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AFTER THE FAULT

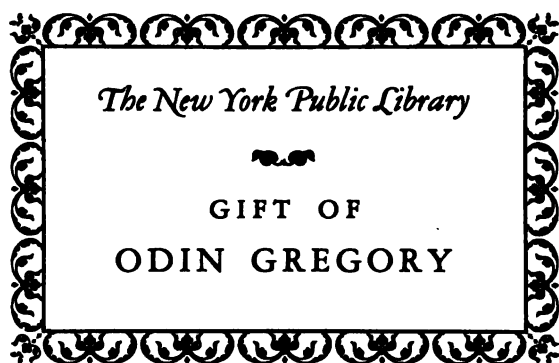
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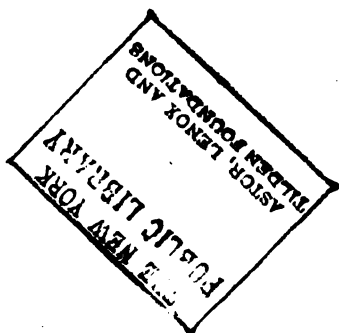
IRENE OSGOOD,

*who told me, one radiant and
memorable morning, of how,
in reading this story, her eyes, during
the night, had been dimmed many
times, and who thus gave my
work the double approval of
a beautiful woman and a true artist,*

THIS BOOK

*is, with the homage of profound
respect and admiration,*

DEDICATED.





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AFTER THE
FAULT

A NOVEL

ROBERT H. SHERARD ^{CC.}

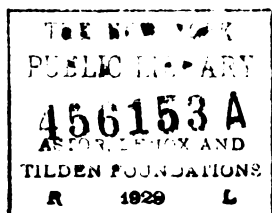


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AFTER THE FAULT.

CHAPTER I.

THE woman who wrote me that letter must have been of a cruel nature. Yet even she, I think, would have been sorry for what she had done, if she could have witnessed my grief after I had read it.

The accusation against my wife, which it contained, was couched in no ambiguous terms. I was this, it said, and my wife was that. The name of the accomplice was also given.

The writer signed herself "A Well-Wisher."

I looked at the envelope and saw that this letter had been posted in the suburb where my home was. It was addressed to my chambers in the Temple; where I had received it. I did not once find myself wondering who the writer might be.

I did not doubt that this immense misfortune



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had befallen me. My eyes had been opened suddenly. I saw and I understood, and, laying my head down on my arm, I groaned aloud.

In that moment of acute mental agony I saw, as in a prophetic vision, the utter desolation of my days to come. I never hoped again.

To my spiritual anguish great physical torture added itself. An intolerable weight pressed on my bosom—the *peine forte et dure* of jealousy; and it was as if an iron claw were clutching at my throat. My temples throbbed and little drops of moisture sprung from my crimson forehead.

Just then the boisterous entry of the barrister whose chambers I shared aroused me to a consciousness of surrounding things. He was laughing heartily and, throwing some papers down on the table at which I was sitting, cried out—

“You should have come to the Divorce Court to-day. The rummiest go! Just fancy——”

I looked up at him, and the laughter died on his lips.

“I beg your pardon, old fellow,” he said. “I forgot that you do not care for jokes of that kind. But how dreadfully serious you look. Are you unwell?”



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"I have been reading this brief—the Limehouse Murder Case—in which I am devil to the junior for the Treasury. It is a *crime passionnel*, as the French would call it. A jealous husband who stabs his wife."

"And who will very properly be hanged for it," said my friend. "Our Old Bailey jurors know nothing about crimes of passion, or rather, I should say, they see no excuse for them as French jurymen do. In this particular case, if I remember rightly, the husband pardoned his wife and took her back and lived with her a year or two after her offence. No possibility of pleading the mad impulse of outraged honour here."

"I don't know," I said. "Might not the jealousy grow little by little till it became a passion too strong to be mastered? How was it with the man in 'The Kreutzer Sonata'? But enough," I added, springing to my feet and crushing that awful letter into my side-pocket. "Excuse my manner. Your laughter upset me, having just read this. Things which sound very funny in the Divorce Court——It's the very laughter of fools," I cried passionately, "that drives men to murder."

And, snatching up my hat, I dashed out of the

When I had reached the Strand, I took the letter and read it again by the light of the moon. No, I had made no mistake. It was that. "A Well-Wisher!"

I was touched on the arm, and, as if a dreadful invitation was hiccuped at my ear, I started back in horror, indignant at the clinging fingers, and dashed them away. I pulled up, as though turned round by a thought had come to me that since she was that—for her also I must have felt indignation. Horror and indignation were so much tenderness, a love scene.

This thought clung to me as I hurried down the Strand, I found myself with anguishing curiosity into my own smirking face. A feeling of curiosity had arisen within me. I had crossed

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It filled me with wonder that my headlong, forward course should be resented by the people whom I pushed out of my way. Did not my great tragedy invest me with that superlative superiority which clears the road before the stricken man? My business seemed so all-important that I could not understand that by petty affairs precedence should not be awarded. Way for the Broken Heart! Way for my lord of the Broken Heart!!

I had fixed on no line of conduct. My immediate purpose was to lay the denouncing letter before my dear wife. What would be my action on her certain avowal of the imputed fault, I had no preconception. Only this, that I should show no violence. No, there would be no violence. My sorrow was too deep for that. It was such a pity! So sweet a woman and so deep a fall! It was as if I had heard that her dear face had been hopelessly disfigured by a cruel accident, as though I were hastening home to mourn with her her ruined beauty. Violence! Anger! When she was so utterly undone!

There is, close to Charing Cross Station, close to the Station of My Dear Queen, a shop where they sell very pretty flowers and beautiful fruit, and



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every evening I used to stop there and buy for my dear queen a little present : flowers to put in her hair, or in her bosom, a peach that was never as soft as her skin, or grapes which never had the freshness of that little place, which I so loved, upon her nape, under the curls.

That night, by instinct, I drew up here and already had placed my foot upon the threshold of the door, when a thought came to me and I paused. It was followed with lightning speed by another thought, and I broke out into a mocking laugh.

Yes, I said to myself, thou great Justiciary ! She has been naughty, and so must be deprived of dessert, like a child who for misbehaviour is sent away from table before the pudding is served. She has gone down under the waters of life and, to punish her for the weakness which had been unable to resist the flood, I had thought to rob her of the roses for which she had asked me that morning.

A man who had been drinking was my companion in the first-class carriage in which I travelled home. His alcoholic exuberance diverted my thoughts and the genial philosophy which he enunciated was not altogether without solace. He told me that he was a sailor, that, as a boy, he had



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run away from home, for the love of a woman, and that with his present knowledge of womankind, he would have done nothing of the sort. "No, not likely," he said, and repeated. His life at sea had knocked that nonsense out of him, he added, and there was not now living between Land's End and John o' Groats the woman who could make him cross the road.

One coarse thing that he said impressed itself on me, and I often thought of it afterwards.

"When you have smelt the sea," he said, "all their patchoulis and their new-mown hays fairly disgust you. Supposing we don't get no *table d'hôte* on board a collier, we don't find no long hairs in our soup neither."

"But, perhaps," he added, leering at the flowers which I was carrying, "I am talking to a married man?"

I had no occasion to answer him, for just then the train stopped, and, by a hazard, exactly opposite to the door of a refreshment-bar. He left the carriage hurriedly, after inviting me to "join him in one," and the train started again before he returned.

"A mute, inglorious Schopenhauer," I said to



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myself as we rolled out of the station, and yet then as afterwards his broad contempt for women was not altogether without comfort to me. For as a matter of fact, the intense tragedy with which I had invested myself seemed to me to be beyond my power to play, and I was not dissatisfied that for a moment Æschylus should make way to Aristophanes.

“He makes haste to laugh,” I thought, “so as not to be obliged to weep, and is the Beaumarchais of my dreadful situation.”

I note down faithfully the trifling incidents and the reflections to which these incidents gave rise in the course of my poor little tragedy. For what good? you may ask. Well, I answer, for what good have all those who have suffered greatly told the world of their sufferings, described step by step their several Calvaries, if it be not to comfort others in similar case by the knowledge that fellow-men have so suffered? The unnamed lover of Annabel Lee, Schiller's Tekla and the rest of them.

That it should be pouring with rain when I reached the station of my suburb was but in the irony of English things. I took a four-wheeled

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cab and lumbered home, devoid of that awful majesty with which I had felt myself environed. At the door of my house I had an unseemly wrangle on the question of his fare with a dripping cabman. Aristophanes had altogether supplanted Æschylus.

"Some gents," said the cabman, "will spend pounds and pounds on flowers for them as should not have them and refuse a paltry half-a-crown on a cruel night to a hardworking family-man. I knows what I thinks of them. "

I said: "Here! Give these flowers to your missus."



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CHAPTER II.

WHEN I had let myself into the hall, I called out for my wife, mastering my emotion as far as I was able to do.

There was no answer and I called again, angrily, with impatience. Although my possession had been disputed, I was resolved to assert it, at least in my own house.

Then I remembered that she had told me in the morning that she was going that evening to a sacred concert at the Crystal Palace, and would not be home till midnight.

The blood rushed to my head, as it flashed across my mind that this might have been the pretext given to hide another meeting—that at that very moment I was being betrayed, that the other man——

The other man! Till that minute, I had never given thought to him as an individual. The abstract idea of the horror that had befallen me had alone held my mind. Otherwise how could I



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have failed to remember that the person named to me in the letter of denunciation had left the country more than a month previously to join his regiment at a foreign station?

Some relief followed on this recollection. My pressing fears for the immediate present were thus unfounded. He, at least, could not come between her and me, when it was so necessary for us to be alone, face to face. I had no anger against him, none of the fury that in former times, wondering on these things, I had fancied would blaze up in my heart. I only felt how pitiful it was that one man should so deal by a fellow-man, should wilfully cause him such sorrow and such suffering and shame as had been so cruelly inflicted on me; should so waste and degrade a woman, made to be sweet and pure and held in high honour.

It seemed to me rather that there was now between me and this other man an awful affinity, a monstrous relationship, which excluded blood-hatred, whilst aggravating the sense of the injustice which had been done to me.

It occurred to me that this want of indignation on my part was a sign of a base and unmanly nature, but I also remembered that I had never



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lacked courage. Both in Germany and in France I had acquitted myself well on what is called the field of honour, satisfying resentments for offences which compared with this offence were trivial to vanishing point. But impetuous, ardent, and bellicose there, here I found myself passive and resigned.

Perhaps it was because I felt that whilst no act of mine could undo what had been done, could recall what was so entirely irrevocable, no punishment which I could inflict, which man could inflict (did that punishment contain the essential horrors of a hundred deaths), could atone for the suffering which had been laid upon me.

I know that as I passed through the hall to my study, I noticed that the fastenings of a certain window, easily accessible from the outside, were in need of repair, and reflected that until these repairs were carried out the house would not be safe against burglars; and that it occurred to me that if men did come to rob me, aye, to murder me, I could not do violence to them. What would be any injury they could inflict upon me compared with the one that I had received? Unable to feel anger—because my grief drowned every other

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feeling—against the man who had broken my heart and devastated my life, whence could I draw resentment against aggressors, by comparison, kind indeed?

My supper was laid out for me, as was the usual custom, in my study, but the only thing that I noticed upon the table was a bottle of whisky. I remembered then the convivial philosophy of my fellow-passenger and wondered—— But the time for that had not come yet.

I glanced at my books, wondering again whether here in the pages of men who had suffered all things, pitied all things, I might find a little of the comfort which I so sorely needed. I took down a Bible, but replaced it without opening it, for I felt that I lacked the resignation necessary to approach the altar. And again it was the fleshly, not the spiritual man that in me was calling out. In Heaven—I remembered that I should find this here—there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, and I was a poor man in the bonds of marriage and most unhappy.

I found myself turning over the pages of *Othello* and vaguely feeling that in his jealous transports, the Moor displayed not love for the gentle



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Desdemona, but an inordinate conceit of himself. His final act now struck me as a brutal and inexcusable crime, the best proof that he could give that he had never really loved his wife. Some months previously, whilst listening to the summing-up of an Old Bailey judge, who had expressed himself in this sense on the conduct of a prisoner in a *crime passionnel* of the New Cut, I had attributed his opinion to the fact that he was a bachelor. I now felt how entirely in the right he had been.

But I could give little attention to the printed page. I was on the alert, listening for the swing of the garden gate, waiting for the return of her towards whom never before had I felt tenderness so deep; but of her also towards whom never before that night had I had pity to feel. There was the sorrow of it all. I had pity to feel. She who had been so high was now so low as to be an object of pity!

Beyond giving an order to one of the servants, I had made no preparation whatever for our meeting and its consequence. I had thought out no phrases; the very notion of assuming this or that dramatic attitude in a situation so tragic had never occurred to me; and if any resolution at all had

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been formed in my mind as to how I would speak to her, it was that I would be very gentle, very compassionate, like a father towards a well-loved child who is in great distress.

She had never seemed to me more beautiful, more pure, more womanly than when I saw her that night, as I met her in the hall. I stepped forward to greet her, but suddenly halted as though a wave of physical repulsion had driven me back.

"How good of you to wait up for me, darling," she had cried when she had first seen me. When I drew back, beaten back, she gave a start and peered into my face with a look of anguished inquiry.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! Oh!"

"Yes," I said. "It is as you think."

Then she turned towards the door with the gesture of a frightened woman, cowering somewhat, yet prone to flight. Her face had flushed a deep dye.

I said: "Will you come into my study and speak to me? But first take off your wet things."

As she remained crouching with her hand on the door, I stepped up to her, and, speaking low lest the servants should hear me, I said—



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"You have no reason to be afraid. Surely you have a better opinion of me than to be afraid?"

With these words I gently disengaged the clinging, nervous fingers from the handle of the door, then turned the key, put up the chain and drew the bolts.

We were tight and fast, we two, in our dishonoured home, ravaged for evermore.

I stepped towards my study-door and there turning, looked back. She was standing upright under the halo of the lamp, immobile, staring and white—so white. I saw the little apple in her throat come and go. God forgive the man who put such horror in those eyes.

"I am waiting for you," I said.

Then, as my voice sounded to me stern and judicial, I repeated: "I am waiting for you, dear."

At the term of endearment, she gave a start, then began to tear off her things, flinging her gloves here, her hat there, her cloak in another place.

The minute after she was crouching at my feet, clinging to my knees. I could feel her warm bosom pulsing against them.

I raised her up and drew her into the room, and after I had closed the door, I led her to a chair.

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Then I put a glass of wine to her lips, hearing her teeth clatter against the crystal rim.

"This letter," I said, at last, "came to my chambers this afternoon." And I placed under her eyes the death-warrant of her honour and of mine.

"Oh, God be thanked," she cried, "that the lie is out, that the comedy is played! But let me go! Let me go!"

"Go? Where to?"

"Anywhere—anywhere away from you whom I have so wronged."

"In all this, dear," I said, "I am thinking only of you."

She looked up at me with such a look of affection in her eyes, that I moved towards her to comfort and caress. But I was driven back again, and this time I felt real physical pain in my breast. It was as if a burning hand were squeezing my heart and lungs into one tortured mass.

"You are too kind to me"—she gasped as she spoke—"but you must send me away. I am not fit to remain in this house. I ought to have left it at once—after—after—— But I could not bear to leave you, for I know how you love me, and I



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thought it would be better to hide all, here in my bosom, and to try to be so good to you that I might perhaps, some day—perhaps when we had both grown old—be able to forgive myself. And I was selfish, too, for you know that I love you, and better now than ever. I could not bear the thought never to see you again. You will not believe me. You cannot believe me, I know, after this, after what you have learned, but it is so—it is so, my dear, dear husband !”

I said nothing, but remained standing in the middle of the room. After a while, it occurred to me that there might be something dramatic and judicial in this erect attitude, and so went and sat down opposite to her on the other side of the room, far from the troubling perfume of her hair.

“I fell into this black, black shame,” she continued, “without willing it, almost without knowing it. It was the sound of the door slamming as—as there was a going-away, that aroused me to consciousness. I ran to my mirror and stared at my face to see if it were I, if it really could be I who had—who was—and since then the agony—the agony——”

She burst out crying and wrung her hands. I rose.

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"It is late," I said, "and we had better retire."

She looked up quickly and dashed the tears from her eyes with her white and jewelled fingers.

"We can decide on the future to-morrow," I said. "But do not distress yourself, for no harm shall come to you, from me at least."

I passed out into the hall. She was with me, at my side, like a scented flash. I was lighting my bedroom taper at the little table on which it was placed ready for the night.

"Oh," she cried, "there are two candles there to-night!"

"Yes," I said, "there are two candles there to-night."

CHAPTER III

WHEN I had reached the
been prepared for n
knowing why, I had locked myself
sat down on my bed, feeling as
miserable, as when having left the
little boy, I first found myself
bedroom.

Here at last before this visible p
tude to which I was hereafter conde
mastered me, and I burst into tea
have sobbed aloud it would hav
oppression, but I feared that my v
me and from pity, with which I
mingled to some degree, I gulped d
flood of inarticulate exclamation.

My self-commiseration was not



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in the possession of my wife, of her love and faith, the rejoicing guardian of so much beauty and purity and honour. Other men had riches and some had fame. I had had this. Some men had youth and some had great personal gifts. I had had this. Some men had hosts of friends and relatives, devoted to them. I had had this.

And now the one good thing had been taken away from me.

At the same time, as I thought over the past, my very want of success now inspired me with consolation. The triumph of that other man, when my mediocrity was considered, was small indeed. It was not a conquest of which he was likely to boast, as he might have been tempted to do, had I, the vanquished, been a man in the front rank, a man known to the world, a man of whom people talked. I was but a plain, middle-aged barrister, earning by hard work at the Bar and with my pen a moderate income; a man of the suburbs, who kept only two servants and who travelled by omnibus, with a black bag in his hand. My name would never be mentioned in the mess-room over the wine and bring on to his lips the smile of gratified vanity.



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Austerlitz, Jena, Marengo, no doubt, made the hideous General Neipperg feel very proud.

But then, must I lay aside all ambition for the future, lest by reason of that awful affinity which bound me to this man, any success to which I might attain, should enhance his triumph and add to his satisfaction? Did I not in some way belong to his *familia*, so that any glory of mine would reflect itself on him, at least in his own way of thinking? This thought added to my pain, till the reflection came that my life was broken, that my ship had sunk and that ambition, with all the rest of its freight, had gone down for ever.

All this while I could hear in the room below me—it was what had been our room—the steps of my wife as she paced to and fro. An hour passed, two hours passed, and still the steps went on. At last the door opened and she came out, and I heard her foot on the stairs which led up to my room. I put out my hand and extinguished the light and waited. But she came no higher than a step or two and then seemed to sit down on the staircase; where, as I judged from the sound, she was sobbing gently.

I stole forward, groping my way, and noiselessly



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unlocked my door. The puny barrier of an iron hasp was unnecessary, when between us yawned a gulf which never, never could be bridged.

I had not expected to see her in the morning, but she came down to breakfast as usual, and when we were alone together, she said—

“What have you decided? I will obey you in everything.”

I said, affecting jocularly, for she looked inexpressibly sad—

“Decided? I have decided on bacon and eggs. Won’t you try a kidney?”

We ate, or pretended to eat, for some minutes in silence. At last she said—

“I have been crying all night, for I cannot bear the thought of leaving you.”

“There was no reason then for your tears,” I said. “I have no wish to drive you away from this house. We will go on in the future as in the past, and things shall never be referred to by either of us. We will go on together like the good friends we have always been.”

She brightened up. Then she said timidly—

“Will it always be—will it always be as it was last night?”



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"That I come home empty-handed?" I said.
"No, dear, you shall have some flowers to-night."

I got up and presently left the house. She came to the window and threw me a kiss. I raised my hat.

My unhappiness increased the further I got away from home. A feeling of unrest, a fretful anxiety had taken possession of me. At every moment I found myself wondering what she might be doing, and the question kept presenting itself to me whether I had acted kindly in leaving her all alone when she was so overcome with distress.

There was fresh work waiting for me at my chambers, and at any other time I should have been pleased at the prospect of further gain. As it was I felt the uselessness of endeavour. All the industry I could apply would never win back to me the peace of mind which I had lost. I pushed the tedious, importuning papers aside, and leaned back in my chair, wondering why men who were happy in their homes should trouble about such trivialities as formed the subject of these disputes.

"Here is a man, who refuses to pay a tailor's bill," I said to myself, "on the ground that 'the goods' did not fit him. He is evidently very much

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in earnest and I am briefed to defend his case at the Westminster County Court. Misfitting clothes! Good heavens, to live in a cave and to be dressed in the skins torn off wild animals, and to be the undisputed master of that cave and its mistress!"

I felt that I should never again feel any interest in the occupation in which, till then, I had been engaged, and I began to look forward with terror to the prospect which such a frame of mind so menacingly held out for my future. I was a poor man. I had always lived up to my income. My investments were small. As to my wife, a friendless girl with only one rich relative, she had come to me without a penny. I had loved her all the better for that.

It was only by zeal and initiative that I could hope to maintain my present position, it was only by renewed effort that I could hope to improve it. And I felt that with ambition all energy had left me. In that moment I had the chilling presentiment of the things that awaited me, yet found myself indifferent and resigned.

If I had loved my wife less, if my principles had been different, a way could have been found out of my trouble. But the thought of divorce had



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never even suggested itself to me. To what good, condemn myself to a life altogether solitary? To a man of my way of thinking the relief that the Court could give me would entitle me only to perpetual widowhood. Widowhood there would surely be, even now, but friendship, companionship might still be enjoyed and the friend, the companion, was one who was dearly cherished. Why should I put her away? She had no relatives and but few friends and she was very fond of me. Soiled as she was and in some ways—that I should have to say this!—an object of repugnance to me, I still felt that life without her would be intolerable. But all the same what a terrible difference in my life! The thing of which we should never speak would ever be present between us. It would sit at our table, it would crouch at our fireside. Our life would be one long play at hide-and-seek with this thing—a farce, a tattered medley, a lie.

My friend, on arriving, expressed surprise to find me dawdling in my chair, with the papers lying about my feet.

“Hullo!” he cried. “Slacking it?”

“Yes,” I said. “What’s the good of troubling about anything?”



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"A splendid device for a millionaire, no doubt," he said, sitting down to his desk, "but as neither of us are that, supposing we get to work? Have you finished your notes on the Limehouse case?"

"No, and I don't intend to. I can't deal with the matter in an impartial spirit. I look on the prisoner as an unmitigated ruffian——"

"As, no doubt, he is. A man who condones such an offence and then, a year or two afterwards, takes his revenge, deserves no consideration, and, I hope, will get none."

"How do you know that he condoned the offence?"

"Why! He lived with his wife, after he had found her out."

"That proves nothing. There may have been moral condonation only, for the sake of the children, for the sake of appearances, for a hundred other reasons."

"*'Solus cum sola,'* you know," said my friend. "I don't believe in moral condonation only. It is impossible."

"I don't know about that. It only requires a little self-control on the husband's part. I can well



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imagine that a man might have such affection for his wife, that in spite of her offence he could continue to give her the shelter of his home, whilst treating her, say, as a gentleman treats his house-keeper."

"In our rank of life, perhaps, but not in a workman's cottage. The very smallness of the home would be against that. In any case the position would be a false one, and absurdly so. And devilish unfair to the wife!"

"Unfair!"

"Yes, unfair. What right has the man to sentence her to eternal widowhood, to an unnatural condition of life? And how could he blame her if she afterwards went wrong again? Why it's passive collusion on his part. Collusion, and no other name for it!"

"Goodness, gracious! We are talking of men and women, and not of animals!"

"In some respects, unfortunately, the terms are synonymous."

"Then, what would you have the husband do?"

"Divorce, and if he must marry again, hope for better luck next time. Though it has always seemed to me that the advantage of marriage is



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that it prevents one from committing that folly twice."

"To a great many people, marriage is a sacrament, and divorce a sacrilege. And not to Catholics only."

My friend made no answer. He had drawn his papers towards him and was bending over them. Of course, he had every reason to work. Interest in life remained to him.

"Excuse me for interrupting you again," I said, "but there's a brief that was delivered this morning. Westminster County Court. Some absurd dispute about some clothes between a tailor and his customer. I'm for the tailor—no, for the customer—can't possibly attend to it. Will you take the thing? The fee is all right. And now I must be off. I have a very important telegram to send."

The telegram was to my wife, and the girl behind the counter grinned as she counted the words—

"Am thinking of you. With the deepest love," I had written. I fancied that she might be in need of comfort to bring her through the day.



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CHAPTER IV.

I DID not return to my chambers that day, and soon after I had sent off the telegram I took the train back to my home. I did not feel at ease away from my wife. An anxiety as to her welfare, such as I had never felt before, urged me to her side. I understand now that this was mere physical jealousy. At the time I flattered myself that it was prompted by a nobler motive.

I found the poor girl in no small state of excitement. Together with my telegram, she had received another from the relative to whom I have referred as the one person in her family who was otherwise than needy. This was a great-aunt, a spinster lady of very considerable fortune. My poor wife had often told me that she was her favourite niece, adding—

“Perhaps some day your penniless girl will bring you a fortune.”

The old lady, it appeared, had arrived in town that morning, and desired to be accommodated for the night at our house. She announced her arrival for the hour of dinner.

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"This is very awkward," I said. "Which room can we give her?"

We had the painters in the house, and two bedrooms were uninhabitable.

"Our room, of course," said my wife. Then she corrected herself, hanging her head. "My room, I mean. It is only for one night. She hates to be away from home, and never spends more than twenty-four hours in town."

"Well, it is very awkward," I repeated, "but it can't be helped, I suppose. Get the room ready for her. You can have the room I slept in last night."

"And you?"

"Oh, I can sleep on the sofa in the breakfast-room, or I can pretext an all-night sitting at the House."

"Oh! You must never leave us to-night. She is dreadfully nervous, and could not sleep if she knew that there was no man in the house. She would go away at once and you know, dear, that we ought not to offend her."

"I do not want to offend her," I said, "but I do not see——"

"You mustn't forget that I am her favourite niece, and that——"



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"Do you think," I cried, "that all the money in the world, after what has happened——"

"I thought," said my wife, "that we were never going to allude to that again."

"You are right," I said. "I am sorry. I ought not to have said what I did. But you know that I care nothing for money."

In preparing for our relative's reception, the day passed busily. I had flowers to buy for the table and after that I had to hunt out a wine-dealer's where the particular brand of port was sold, the only wine which the old lady could drink. I was kept occupied all day, and took pleasure in my change of occupations. It seemed to me that I was a schoolboy playing truant, and I enjoyed the holiday I had stolen. I could not help pitying my friend, pleading in his wig and gown that "the goods" were indeed misfits. I laughed at the absurdity of such employment.

The aunt was a stout, short woman, with white hair and a very red face, the very embodiment of good living and the resultant joviality. She greeted me warmly, showing an affection both for my wife and myself which I had never suspected.

"But," she said, "I am very disappointed to see

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that there's no nursery in this house, and that there's no likelihood of one being wanted. I did so want to be a great-great-aunt before I die."

Like many spinster ladies who live well, she took the greatest interest in the doings of Lucina.

The Boer War was at that time in progress, and at dinner the old lady talked of little else. She was wonderfully well-informed about the different regiments who were engaged at the front, and seemed to know the personal histories of all the officers. It appeared that the Army List was her favourite reading.


"I see in to-night's paper," she said, in the course of her remarks on the war, "that the —th has been ordered out from Gibraltar. It's a fine regiment, and so the Dutchmen will find. But," she cried, looking at my wife, "what's the matter, dear?"

The regiment which she had named was the regiment to which the "other man" belonged.

My wife disclaimed having felt any commotion.

"There's nothing the matter, dear," she said.

"You turned white and then red," said the old lady, "and I thought that perhaps you had some friend in the regiment. But when I think of it I know that that can't be the case."



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My wife stole a pleading glance at me. I pretended not to see it. I was thinking that if a Boer bullet should go home in a certain breast, the whole of my future life might be changed. Dead the snake, says a French proverb, dead the poison.

Our guest ate heartily and drank glass after glass of heady port.

"The doctor," she said, "tells me that apoplexy lies that way"—referring to her self-indulgence—"but I want to get all the pleasure out of life I can. One lives only once, and I see no good in stinting myself."

After dinner, we went into the drawing-room, where, at her aunt's request, my wife seated herself at the piano and sang sentimental songs—"Some day, I shall meet you," and the like. The old lady was immensely affected, and I saw tears stealing down her flushed cheeks. As for me, the words and the music so irritated me that I found it difficult to keep my seat. Each wailing love-cry revived my sorrow and evoked the picture of my despair. My wife, I felt, realised what effect the songs were producing upon me. As soon as it was possible for her to do so she shut down the piano, pleading that her throat hurt her.



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"Besides," she said, "we must have a rubber of whist before we go to bed. I know that that is your custom at home."

We got out the cards and the table. Our aunt took the dummy, and my wife and I managed to let her win nearly every trick. For the rest, I played worse that night than I usually do. An insane idea beset me that the vacant place to my right was occupied by a wraithlike presence which would never leave my house again. I was overjoyed when the old lady triumphantly proclaimed herself the winner and eagerly pocketed the stakes.

"Dummy always wins?" I remarked, still held by my fixed idea.

"Oh, you shouldn't say that," said my wife. "My aunt played very well to-night."

The moment for retiring having come, I went upstairs to the room I had occupied the previous night, and, in pursuance of a plan on which I had determined, took a stiff dose of chloral. Then I wrapped myself up in a rug and laid down on the sofa. I could hear the ladies talking in the room below. At last, I heard the door open, the sound of kissing and the voice of the old lady: "Now run



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along, dear, don't keep your poor husband waiting."

I turned over with my face to the back of the couch and feigned to be asleep. At that moment my wife entered the room. I heard a sigh, then drowsiness came over me. I could not say whether it was the sound of sobbing that I perceived before I sunk into unconsciousness.

When I awoke, it was close on breakfast time. I started up and looked towards the bed. It had not been occupied that night, and turning round, I saw that my wife was sitting on a chair, with her face buried in her arms which were laid on the table before her, fast asleep. When I had aroused her, I saw that her eyes were very red.

"Yes," she said, "I have been crying all night."

It was, fortunately, the custom of our aunt to take breakfast in bed, and never earlier than noon. My wife had accordingly the time before her to regain her looks. As for me, I had taken leave of the old lady on the previous evening.

That day I had a case in the Law Courts. It was some dispute about a patent burner. I had studied my brief carefully after it had been delivered, but the emotions through which I had

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passed had driven most of the particulars out of my head. I had little time to refresh my memory, before going into Court, and the consequence was that I acquitted myself in a most disgraceful manner. I shall always remember the look of surprise and indignation which the solicitor, who had briefed me, gave me as, after stammering some final incoherencies, I sat down at the close of my speech. How often since have I seen those eyes—that look! The verdict, curiously enough, was given in our favour, thanks no doubt—I cannot say that it was so, for I did not listen—to the judge's summing-up, or possibly, by a hazard, because of the justice of our cause. This should have pacified the solicitor, yet, as I was walking out of Court, he asked me, with a peculiar intonation, whether I were enjoying my usual health. I could see that he fancied that I had been carousing the night before.

My friend, in my chambers, received me in a gloomy manner. He had lost the case against the tailor and seemed to bear me a grudge on that score.

"I wish," he said, "you hadn't put it on to me. Looks bad, you know. Your man was in a dreadful way about it."



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"Never mind," I said. "What does it matter? I am sure you did your best."

"I don't like to take County Court cases," he said, "to say nothing of losing them."

His tone was abrupt, almost discourteous, and I looked at him with some surprise. Since then—long since—I have learned that the man who carries in his flank a mortal wound, invisible though this wound may be, betrays to his fellows by some subtle effluvium which evades from his stricken person, that he is broken, powerless, doomed. Whereupon his fellows act towards him just as the corbies do to one of theirs in similar case. Like all natural laws, it is horribly cruel, but it is also, no doubt, just, with the justice of implacable logic. My friend had given the first peck at my plumage.

I made no answer, but sat down to my table and began to write. It was one of my literary engagements to write a weekly letter on the doings at the Law Courts and Old Bailey, "In Wig and Gown," for a syndicate of provincial papers. The work was remunerative, and I took pleasure in it. That day, however, I could not string three phrases together, and after a while threw down my pen. Then I took out the packet of letters which had been sent in



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that morning from the agency of the syndicate. These were applications for legal advice addressed to the author of "In Wig and Gown," forwarded from the various offices of the newspapers in which my letter appeared.

It occurred to me, and I smiled as the thought passed through my head, that it would not only be humorous but sound as advice to put as an answer to the first question that I had to deal with: "Why bother about it? Nothing is worth troubling about," and to refer all the subsequent correspondents to the first reply.

Never had the petty disputes about which my correspondents consulted me appeared more contemptible; never had their eagerness in the pursuit of squalid interests filled me with greater disgust. Yet it was on these vile and evil passions that I and hundreds of men with me, who lived in the vast enclosure of the Temple, were battenning, and it amused me to think how all we men in wigs should look if suddenly the world became honest and just. The Temple would be a pretty sight after the first fortnight of a true Christian Era.

I had opened and answered several letters, when I came to one which was signed: "An Anxious



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Husband." It came evidently from a man of the working-class, and ran as follows :—

"Sir—Be so good as to tell me in your next lot of answers to Legal Queries in the *Herald*, of which I am a constant reader, what are my rights as a husband, who, having condoned his wife's fault, finds that she considers that act of clemency on his part as a sign of weakness, and goes about telling the neighbours that I am a 'poor, weak fool,' giving details of her offences so as to turn me into ridicule. Details, I may add, which, had I known of them at the time, would certainly have inclined me to another course of action. Please advise me what to do. Have I the right to get a separation on these grounds?—Yours truly,

"AN ANXIOUS HUSBAND."

I passed the letter over to my friend.

"This is what we were talking about yesterday," I said. "What shall I say to this man?"

My friend took the letter with a vague gesture of impatience, and having read it—

"Here is condonation, you see, and the usual result. The woman takes the man for a fool, she



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despises him, and tells everybody that she does so. A woman cannot but despise a man who passes over such an offence. When Daudet wrote 'Le Pardon,' he was writing nonsense, and I believe that he knew it."

"No doubt you are right, where the man lives with his wife after the fault just as he had lived before——"

"And how do you suppose that this 'Anxious Husband' was to live otherwise? Had it been possible for him to do so, the woman would have thought him, and would have described him as, even a bigger fool, keeping another man's fancy out of some absurd sentiment which she would not even try to understand. Here let me answer this for you."

He wrote a few words on a slip of paper and passed it over for me to read. This is what he had written—

"AN ANXIOUS HUSBAND.—Having, as you say, condoned the offence, you can take no action against your wife. No magistrate would grant you a separation on the grounds you mention. As you have made your bed, so you must lie on it."

... out of the house as soon as he h
out? I have no sympathy with him w

"You are not married," I said.

"No, and not likely to be. I have p
long in the D.C. for that," retorted
turning to his papers again.

After a while he looked up again and

"I have no patience with these—with t
shall I call them? Condonation John
ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the
woman on either because she appeal
senses, or because she is a good hous
cook, or because they think they may
difficulty in finding another companion.
words, in ninety-nine cases out of a hu
act from a purely selfish motive. In sp
they posture to themselves and to
wretched woman as a saint of self-sacri
motive. The wife is —"



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gratitude under such circumstances? The woman sees through his motive and despises a man who prefers his convenience to his honour, and she takes the first opportunity that presents itself of marking her contempt. She naturally also feels resentment against him for his Pharisaical assumption of benevolence towards her. *Dixi.*"



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CHAPTER V.

IT is not well for the unhappy to live in towns. The town is immutable; its aspects change not at all. This house, that street-corner, recall to memory now happier times—for is not the past always happier?—now the faces of those one has loved and lost. There is a certain club-house in Pall Mall before which I never pass without thinking, as I look up at a certain window, how it was here that on the eve of my going up to Oxford my father spoke to me in earnest guidance. I remember the impatience with which I listened to his advice, my yearning to be gone; I remember how long each minute seemed. To-day how many days of my life would I not give in exchange for one single minute in his dear presence? It was at that street corner that I took farewell of this friend or that. This was the shop into which my wife and I, young lovers, then, looked with envying eyes.


For this reason, those who live in the country suffer less from the rude recalls of memory. For

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who by the hedge in flower need remember the days when all was bare? In the country, as by the sea-side, the scene is always changing. The heartless *Memoria Technica* of towns is here altogether wanting.

For years past my life had been spent in London, and everywhere there was something to remind me of days, the happiness of which I could never hope to reach again. I felt this in all its bitterness that afternoon of the third day of my suffering, when having thrown down my rebellious pen in disgust, I had hurried out to tame, by violent exercise, the restless fever which held me. I do not think that ever did the terrible loneliness of London impress itself more forcibly upon me than that day, during my aimless rush along the streets. I felt that I had no home to go to—no place of refuge. I felt that of the six million hearts that were ticking around me, not one, not one beat in unison with mine. I looked into the placid faces of the men and women whom I passed and envied them, with a rancour of envy of which I had never thought myself capable, the quiet and comfortable felicity which seemed to emanate from their mental equipoise.

I went striding along, and must have covered



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many miles, when a sudden faintness came over me. I declare that at first I thought that I was going to die and I declare also that the thought comforted me. Like a flash there darted through my mind a story that a friend had told me about a well-known man, who said to his valet, as he helped him into a chair, a fit having taken him : "This time, Parker, it means death, and God be thanked for that." I felt that I could say the same. But though my feeling of weakness was extreme, I kept on my feet. Yet I was too dizzy to walk on, indeed I could not see ahead, and my heart seemed to have stopped beating. Brandy was the only remedy that lay within my reach, so I entered a public-house. The barmaid looked at me in a curious way as I gasped out my request and seemed to hesitate. Then she consulted some man behind a curtain, who came out and scrutinized me. I heard him say, "He's all right," and the moment after the brandy was before me. I gulped it down, and felt at once the beneficent effects of the reaction which it provoked. These effects were, however, only of very short duration, for I had not walked more than twenty yards away from the public-house, when the same feeling came over me. I



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staggered, reeled forward and fell to the ground in a fainting fit.

As I afterwards learned this happened just at the corner of Vine Street in Piccadilly, and when I recovered consciousness I found myself seated on a chair in the "receiving-room" of the police-station in that street.

The first words that I heard were—

"Now that he has come-to, constable, I will take the charge."

Another voice said: "Picked him up at the end of the street, and noticed that he smelt of brandy something awful. The charge will be drunk and incapable."

"Put him into the dock," was the order given.

I felt myself roughly lifted to my feet and hustled into a kind of enclosure. An iron bar which worked on a hinge was let down in front of me, and I remember thinking with gratitude that it would save me from falling to the ground if I fainted again.

I now discerned that I was facing a man in uniform, who was sitting behind a table with a register open before him. He had a pen in his hand. He spoke to me several times before I



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realised that he was questioning me. At last I understood that he was asking me my name. I gave it, and in answer to other questions, my age, profession and address. My lucidity of mind was now returning to me, and when the inspector informed me that I was charged with being drunk and incapable, I was able to refute the charge with all the indignation that it aroused in me.

"Preposterous," I cried. "I had a fainting fit. I suffer from a weak heart."

"And took brandy to improve matters, I suppose?" said the official with a sneer; "for you can't deny that you smell of brandy. We know all about weak hearts here," he added, "and we have a gentleman who sits at Marlborough Street every morning to prescribe for the same. Very reasonable in his charges too. Five shillings is his average."

"I most emphatically deny that I am intoxicated," I said. "I demand to see a doctor, who will certify——"

"Very well," said the inspector, interrupting me, "the divisional surgeon shall be sent for. It will cost you seven-and-six, and it won't do you any good. In the meanwhile you will be taken to the



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cells. If you can find anybody, a respectable householder, mind, to bail you in two guineas, you will be released, as soon as you are sober."

It was useless to resist, eager as I felt to fight for my liberty. I was far too weak even to remonstrate with energy against the outrage put upon me. A constable took me by the arm and led me down a passage which ran between a double row of doors. One of these he opened, and pushed me in. I found myself in a police-cell. At one end was a bench. The door was slammed-to behind me, and I heard the key turn in the lock. It is a terrible sensation, I then realised, when a free man hears a key being turned upon him for the first time. A flush of shame encrimsoned my cheeks.

I went and sat down on the bench, and felt in my pocket for my note-book, so that I might have something with which to pass the time. Then I discovered that during my state of unconsciousness, I had been searched and that my pockets were empty.

After about a quarter of an hour a constable came to the door and, looking through a small grating, said—

"Feeling a bit better now?"



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"I will thank you for a drink of water," I said;
"I feel very faint."

He muttered something, and walked away. Then I heard some discussion at the end of the passage, and in the end the words—

"Not you! He wants to wash the smell of the booze out of his mouth against the coming of the divisional surgeon."

My indignation at this treatment was great. At the same time, all this interested me. It showed me a side of the special world in which I lived which had been unknown to me. I began to feel some respect for my profession, which that day I had derided. We stood between poor prisoners and the tender mercies of such men as for the present held me in their power.

Two hours or more passed before the doctor I had summoned arrived. I had passed that time in listening perforce to the obscene songs of a drunken woman who was confined in the cell which adjoined to mine. It seemed the fitting accompaniment to the thoughts which haunted me.

When the doctor arrived, I was fetched out of my cell and taken before him in a room at the end of the corridor. He was a scrubby-looking little man



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with red whiskers and an inflamed countenance. He peered at me through his *pince-nez* and then looked at the inspector in a knowing manner.

"I have asked you to examine me, sir," I said, "in order to certify that these men are mistaken in saying that I am drunk. Drunk!" I cried indignantly. "I have never been drunk in my life. I am a respectable man, a barrister-at-law, and——"

"We'll see about that," said the doctor. Then he put his rubicund nose to my mouth and shook his head. "*Hic latet*," he said, and laughed. Then he felt my pulse. "Weak and irregular—decidedly feverish!"

"I suffer from a weak heart," I began.

"And take brandy for that, eh?" he retorted. Then he put a piece of paper before me, and motioning to me to take up a pen, said—

"Please write your name on this."

I was trembling with indignation, and my hand shook so that the signature which I produced certainly bore but little resemblance to the one that was registered at my bank.

He laughed again after he had examined it, and said—

covered from a dead faint."

"Oh, yes! Well, say, 'Metl
auto-car to Jerusalem' six times

"I shall do nothing of the kind
blasphemous tomfoolery."

"Well, then, for another test,

Then, turning to one of the constables

"Draw the chalk-line on the floor

When this had been done he
slowly along the line. I refused

"Why not ask me to dance (I
I cried.

The doctor jumped up.

"I certify that this man is r
heavy bout of drunkenness. T
fectly justified. I do not, howev
why he should not be released on
hour or two."

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to bail me out. I hesitated. I was not anxious that any of my friends should hear of this miserable adventure. Then I thought of my wife, and a wild longing came upon me to return to her side. So I gave the name of my friend in the Temple, and asked the inspector to give the constable who was to be sent on the errand, the money for a cab-fare.

As ill-luck would have it, my friend was not at home when the messenger called, and by the time the latter had returned to the police-station it was past midnight. As it was then too late for me to get a train home, and as I did not care to apply to anybody else for my release, I resigned myself to pass the night in the cells. A pillow and a rug were handed in to me, and, worn out as I was with fatigue and excitement, I soon fell asleep.

I will not relate in any detail the squalid experiences that were mine on the following morning. With others charged with drunkenness I was conveyed to Marlborough Street in a prison-van, and after a dreary waiting in charge of the constable who had arrested me, I was placed in the dock. The magistrate gave a start as he recognised me. I had often had business of another kind in his Court. But he was so courteous as to pretend that

and was beginning to explain, when interrupted me and said to the gaoler standing by the dock—

“Is anything known about this man?”
The gaoler shook his head.

“No, your worship,” he said. “I have never seen him here before.”

“You seem to have put yourself in a wrong position,” said the magistrate, addressing me. “You can go away and don’t come here again.”

There was nothing to be said or done. I stepped out of the dock, branded and shamed. As I was leaving the Court, I noticed some people near the magistrate’s door, whose case I had so badly miscarried before. He averted his face as he saw me. When I had reached the street, I was touched on the arm, and, looking round,



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needn't worry about this case. Nothing will appear in the papers."

"Thank you," I said, and shook his hand. It was evident that the good fellow thought to do me a service, and so I did not express to him the icy indifference that I felt. Would he have believed me if I had told him that nothing, nothing mattered to me now?

For the rest, what did it matter that the papers would pass over in silence, "A Barrister's Troublesome Heart." I had been recognised by two people, the magistrate and the solicitor. The latter, I knew, would have the story all over my particular world before nightfall.

I did not care. I had but one desire—to get back home as fast as could be to my wife. I shuddered to think the reason she might have imagined to explain my night-long absence. Would she believe the story that I had to tell her, and if she did not, what could comfort her? I had half a mind to turn round and to hail the journalist, to beg him that the case might be published far and wide. What did shame to me, who was innocent, matter as compared with grief to her, who was guilty?

Then it occurred to me that I had in my pocket a



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receipt from the police for the doctor's fee. This would be sufficient documentary evidence. As it turned out it was, indeed, a good thing that I possessed the means of convincing my wife where I had passed the night. I found her in an agony of grief, about to leave my house for ever.

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CHAPTER VI.

I THINK that it is a mistake to depict Fortune as a blind goddess.

In the distribution of her favours, possibly, her eyes are veiled, but when she has elected to pursue with her fury some unhappy man, she tears the bandage from her eyes and loses not sight of him until she has driven him into the abyss. I was never her courtier. In ordering my life, I had left nothing to hazard, and all that I had desired of her was that, whilst withholding her favours, she should also spare me her resentment.

It was to become impressed upon me, alas ! only too vividly, that that mysterious power, which is called Fortune, or Luck, and which the *esprit fort* professes to deride, is in fact the arbiter of the lives of men. Napoleon, than whose brain there never was a mightier one, humbled himself, even in the moments of his supreme omnipotence, before a Force, of which he knew that if he did not conciliate it, all the plans that his genius might inspire

misfortunes, I should have attributed them to chance and logical progression. But for that I should not have neglected my work and thus incurred grave dissatisfaction to one of my principles, and but for the frenzy which it had aroused I should never have rushed out on that fatal night through the streets, knowing my state of health, the imprudence of taking violent and excessive exercise. That had led to faintness, faintness to brandy, and the odour of this had prepared the ground for a blunder which was to be my ruin. But, as I say, I loved the poor girl too much to harbour resentment against her on this occasion, and preferred to argue myself, in spite of my scepticism, into the belief which I have formed above, namely that I had offended, without excuse, the mysterious power, whom great Napoleon deemed it wise to conciliate.

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diminution of employment offered to me. But what did surprise me, was to find by my own experience, how rapidly a man's ruin can be consummated. I had always fancied that the process was a slow one. I found that it took barely ten months utterly to break down a position, which it had taken me nearly twice as many years to build up. I remember thinking how unhappy I should have been if in the days when I was happy and when things mattered to me, I had even dimly suspected its utter insecurity.

No doubt if I had exerted myself with energy, if I had faced my difficulties, if I had used diplomacy to win back the confidence of those on whom my gains depended, the catastrophe might have been averted. But, there! Energy was just what was entirely lacking to me since the day when the fatal blow was struck at my heart. The main-spring was broken irremediably. So as business fell off, I hoped that it might benefit others who had had no previous opportunities, and as to the friends and clients who deserted me, I wished them in my heart a very pleasant journey. I fully understood how fatal was this state of mind to what are called a man's "best interests," but I could not

constantly advising me "to pull myself to
A medical friend suggested shower-bath
alimentation, and tonics. I let them say
not ungrateful to them for their pretence o
in me, but I knew that for my case there
could be no remedy, unless by a miracle
tear from my heart that fatal love for n
For as long as it should last, for so long al
the wound keep open through which my s
my life, were ebbing away. Now far from
ing, this love grew stronger than it had e
before. I never had found her lookin
beautiful than now under the sweet ove
melancholy. For the rest, her devotio
could not but inspire the warmest affectio
was ever on the alert to charm me, to com
to console me in the midst of my thickenin
tions. I feel sure that she suffered all

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surely undeserved. A man of mediocre parts, with no personal attractions, entirely devoid of social influence, it was not surprising that when my character for respectability went my professional chances should go also. As one solicitor said to a friend of mine, who made haste to repeat it, "The Temple is full of men of his capacity. Why should I take my business to a man who may any day stagger into Court in a state of intoxication?"

Indeed business became so rare that after a while I gave up attending my chambers. For the rest, soon after my "arrest," my friend informed me that he had decided to "make other arrangements" about chambers, and, as it was impossible for me to keep them on at my sole expense, I gave up my tenancy, and for the payment of a few guineas a year secured the right to have my name painted up over the door of the office of another friend, where any briefs with which the solicitors might care to favour me could be left. I was to be summoned to town by wire in such an event. No such summons was, however, needed.

I now devoted my time to writing. Unfortunately my best literary engagement, the writing of the weekly syndicate letter to which I have

tion which had shipwrecked my life
out my investments. At the end of
I found myself face to face with the
destitution. I have spoken of my
how rapidly a man's complete ruin
summed. It was then that my w
admirable qualities of her elect
servants were dismissed one after t
with her soft, white, dainty hands
the whole of the household work.
herself an admirable cook, and thou
had never been kept in better order, s
free at an early hour in the afternoon
dress and the occupations to which
accustomed in the old days. She is
helping me in my work. She f
libraries and hunted up the facts w
for the various papers which I h

—continued on page 22—


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in typewriting, and as long as we could afford to pay the rent of a machine she used to copy out my manuscripts for the press. She refused herself every pleasure. She put her native *coquetterie* aside for ever. "I have clothes and things," she said, "to last me a life-time." At the same time she used to expostulate with me if ever I, on my side, attempted to retrench also.

In spite, however, of all her devotion and self-sacrifice, in spite of my unremitting industry, our position went but from bad to worse. The day soon came when we were forced to give up the pleasant house where we had lived since our marriage, and where I had passed the happiest days of my life. We went down the hill. I mean in the literal sense. Our new home was a workman's cottage, in a row of jerry-built houses, in the dismal suburb of Catford. A road that was always ankle-deep in mud led to our "terrace" from the Bromley-Lewisham highroad. At the corner of this lane was a large public-house, round the doors of which ragged and undesirable men congregated. We were informed on renting our cottage on a weekly tenancy that the terrace was inhabited by very respectable people. Indeed our next-door

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neighbour, in the cottage to our right, was a retired postman in receipt of a Government pension. Our rent was eleven and sixpence a week, which was fetched every Saturday by a man with a little black bag. We had a penny-in-the-slot gas-meter. There were the kitchen, scullery, and "parlour" downstairs. Upstairs there were two bedrooms and a closet. In front of us was a large field, not yet built upon. In the middle of this field was a solitary tree with one of its branches standing out at right angles at a convenient distance from the ground, and I remember that as I surveyed the gloomy prospect on the day on which we took possession, it occurred to me that this natural gallows might have been mentioned by the landlord as one of the advantages of the place. The cottage, furnished with the *débris* of our furniture, for we had had to dispose of many things, presented a comfortable appearance, but, oh, the discomfort of its too narrow limits! In these small dwellings one is never alone. To man, to woman, privacy is almost entirely denied. The strongest nerves could not resist the fret of this eternal promiscuity. I could understand the loud clamours of quarrelling that could be heard at any hour of



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the day from one or other of the human kennels in our road.

I chose the "parlour" as my room. I furnished it with a writing-table, a few chairs, my bookcase, and a camp bedstead. It was here that I worked and it was here that I slept. We used to take our meals in the kitchen, and to preserve the local colour I usually dined in my shirt-sleeves.

My wife showed herself here more admirable than ever. She declared that the life delighted her. It would be to her, she said, a perpetual picnic. "I was intended by nature to be a poor man's wife" was a frequent remark she made. The house was kept beautifully, gleamed with scouring and shone with friction. We soon attained the respect of our landlord and of our neighbours, and one day, indeed, the pensioned postman, looking over the fence that divided our backyards, informed me that any day that I liked to come in and take a pipe with him, he would be very glad to see me.

Under other circumstances this existence would have amused me for a time at least. It was a new experience, and for the rest our position carried many enviable privileges with it. We had no

tences a reputation of opulence. We had
dinners. We had tea at seven, and after
to smoke a pipe in the backyard before reaching
my writing-table. My wife did the washing.
I helped her with the mangle, which stood in the
front passage. This mangle gave us a standing
amongst our neighbours. We were the only
people who had a mangle. When this became
known we were frequently applied to by
people who had washing to be smoothed. The
first application was made in this way. I was
in the house, and was engaged on the translation
of that little-known pamphlet by Kant, "*Ueber
die Kunst das kranke Gemueth zu heilen*"—
which interested me for more than one reason.
When a little girl came to the door with a
bundle. When I had asked her her business, she put

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continue to merit some small share of her mother's patronage. I then set to work at the machine, and I flatter myself that the various articles were mangled in a very superior manner. My wife laughed heartily when, on her return, I had told her of the incident, and having counted the different pieces of washing, informed that at the current rate in the mangle-labour market, I had earned twopence farthing during my hour of activity. This sum was duly handed to me in the evening when the little girl came to fetch the work away, and I think that I never felt prouder of any money than of those mouldy coppers. But what had delighted me most about the business was to have heard that hearty, girlish, happy laugh which my wife had given. Might I hope that happiness would come back to her—my fondest wish !

For me, I knew, happiness could never be again. No doubt my German philosopher was in the right in the formula he kept repeating, "*Denke nicht an deine Krankheit und du bist gesund.*" How could I help thinking of the malady which sapped my life? It was always before my eyes, and the dearer my wife grew to me by reason of the nobility of character which she had disclosed, the

face, that lustrous hair, those good
sweetest mouth ! But the thing that wa
stood between us. The abyss that divid
never be bridged.

To keep my dolorous remembrance e
to nullify the kindly effects of Time, a cir
existed. The name of the "other mar
everybody's lips. It appeared every day
papers. Whilst I, his victim, had s
surely been going down into the depth
escaladed the heights of glory. His ach
during the war in progress had been ma
He had become a popular hero, and he de
high honour. The town rang with
Poets and song-writers drew inspiration
acts of bravery. His portrait was to be s
where. It stared us in the face when my
I went to the shops in Catford on o

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of the general opinion. One day indeed this portrait entered our house, for the daily paper which I used to take in presented its readers with a chromo-lithographic presentment of the "Nation's Darling." There he was, with his big sword and his scarred face, "suitable for framing and fit for adorning the palace or the cottage." "*Denke nicht an deine Krankheit und du bist gesund.*" Kant had not foreseen such helps to memory.

I had spread the picture out on my table and was looking at it with a feeling which I shall later describe, when my wife entered the room. I turned my back on her, and walked to the window; I heard her give a gasp, and I turned round. She was deathly pale, her eyes fixed on the portrait. The blood rushed to my head; a wild fury seized upon me, and I cast my rolling eyes about for some weapon with which to strike her down. Jealousy, wild, mad, murderous jealousy had got me. I felt, I knew that she was admiring him. Oh, to strike her to the ground and to pull the walls of my ruined home down upon our two dead bodies, to end it all, this farce, this lie, this forgetting which was one eternal remembrance!

Thank God I mastered myself! The gust of

burst into tears. She glided forward
down before me and laid her head on
Tears rolled silently down her cheeks.
she rose, and folding up the picture card
of the room. During dinner I noticed
of it in the ashes of the kitchen hearth



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CHAPTER VII.

I HAD felt that my wife admired the man. How could it be otherwise? He was admirable. I admired him myself—yes I. I could not help it. In fearlessness, at least, he was a Bayard who had brought into a flaccid century the splendid ardours of mediæval heroism. Without reproach! No, that he was not; one aching heart, at least, called out unceasingly against him. But the story of his deeds was so overwhelming, so irresistible that even I was carried away in the flood of enthusiasm which his name let loose.

I laughed sometimes with bitterness when I thought of how, when I first heard how he had come into my life, I had felt that I must now put away ambition because my advancement would only enhance the satisfaction of his vanity. My advancement! I looked at myself in the glass in my poor room, and laughed at the face I saw. The deep chagrin of the past eighteen months had aged me greatly. It was a worn and haggard face that

clerk. How could any woman be preferring to this, the soldier of whose line breathed virile energy, courage and I began to think that perhaps I had been and illogical in my resentment, that it had been but the outcome of natural selection of which Darwin wrote. This all strength and courage—I was all weakness and timidity. What sort of man was it, that allowed the world to beat him down, as he was beaten down, without a struggle? And the thought presented itself to me that perhaps the day might come when I should feel proud of the affinity which was between that man and me.

After the excitement of moving and settling down in our new abode had passed off, the amusement of studying life in a new and unfamiliar aspect had ceased from wanting.



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were the result of the utter precariousness of my earnings. I was to know to the full the utter hardships of the literary life practised by a man of no great talent and little influence. The morning's post was like the drawing of a lottery, and its prizes were rare. The income that I earned was not only irregular, but was insufficient even for modest requirements. There were times when, but for the resource of the pawnshop, we should have had to send the landlord away without the week's rent. The hard life—for sheer privation was now often our lot—began to tell on my wife. Her looks began to fade; her pretty hands were red, the nails were broken. But her cheerfulness never failed her one single instant. Her encouragement was never wanting to me, and in the moments of my deepest despair she was to me a source of unspeakable comfort. The haps and hazards of our life seemed to amuse her. Our cottage rang with her laughter. One day she came in high glee and told me that she would now be able to contribute towards the household expenses, and explained that she had been asked by our butcher's wife to give her children lessons in French and music. She was to receive a shilling a

chasing," she said, "if I were strong en

In another circumstance also she showed of which her heart was made. One day up to London to see a publisher for translated French books, and having small sum that was owing to me, A.B.C. shop in the Strand for some slightment. Whilst I was waiting to be somebody touched me on the shoulder, around, I recognised, not without difficulty, was terribly changed, a young writer, novelist of great distinction, with whom had been on friendly terms. He was looking fully ill. I asked him to sit down at my table, he told me a pitiful story of his situation, only source of income was derived from translations of a special nature for a certain person who, from what he told me, seemed to t



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St. Pancras to get a little money which he owes me, for I am in arrears with my landlady, and they have threatened to turn me out of the house if I do not pay. I find that he has gone to Dieppe, and instead of the money he has left me a sarcastic little note." He was shaking as he spoke. From the way in which he gulped down the glass of milk which he had ordered, I concluded that he was famishing, and this he afterwards confessed was so. "I feel so weak and so disheartened," he said, "that sometimes I remain in bed all day, and of course get nothing to eat. To-day hunger, but rather the insults of my landlady drove me out on a vain errand."

I had received a small sum from my publisher, and had it in my pocket. I could not do otherwise than divide it with him. So I took one of the two sovereigns which represented a week's work and pressed it into his hand. "This may help you a little," I said. As I touched his hand, however, I felt that it was burning with fever, and, looking him in the face with greater attention, I saw that he was very ill indeed. My mind was at once made up, and I said—

"You are much too ill, my poor fellow, to return

house, at any rate, no harpy will driv
distraction."

He gave a great sigh of relief, and the

"Is it far? I feel so weak that I do no
I could walk to the station, unless it
Cross."

"I'll take you there in a cab," I said.

"And might we travel first-class?" he
cannot bear people and noise."

"We will travel first-class," I said.

It was not until we were driving from
at Catford, that it occurred to me that I
without consideration for my wife, that
have consulted her before bringing a sic
a dying, man to the house. She had
heavy and unaccustomed task to perfor

However, at my very first words, a
entered the house, she dispelled my anx



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I could have kissed her for her kindness, but she had already turned away, and was welcoming our guest at the door. He prayed to be allowed to go to bed at once, and we gave him the room on the back, on the upper floor.

He remained in our cottage for just six weeks, until he died. His malady was one which never pardons. He was in a galloping consumption, and nothing could have saved his life. Possibly the devoted care which he received in our cottage helped to lengthen his days by a short period. He was at least spared from the awful end which would have been his in his lonely garret or in the infirmary of St. Pancras's Workhouse. He had a friend by his side when the last call came. I was holding up his head as he struggled for breath, and when it came, he used it to convey the last words he ever spoke on earth. "Your wife is an angel from Heaven. God bless her and——" And then he choked, grimaced, and died. There was a woman in the room at the time, the favourite of a bricklayer who lived next door, and who had allowed her to help us in nursing the dying man. When she saw that the end had come she clamoured for two pennies to put on the closed

as then, I may relate that there were no
in the house. An expected remittance
arrived that morning. I had to send
to the public-house to borrow the sur-
lord and master. In the afternoon one
man's relatives, a rich city merchant,
by telegraph, arrived. He was horrified
the story of the destitution into which
had fallen. "That pride," he said,
pride. He never would write to his fr-
he was in distress." It was fortunate
obtained this man's address from our g-
his death, otherwise we should have bee-
let him be buried by the parish. The
man made all the arrangements for the f-
was able to satisfy the coroner's officer,
in the course of the evening, that the
reasonable suspicion of foul-play, an
inquest would be unnecessary. Before

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woman, who laid the body out." When the woman heard this, her excitement was great. An hour later I went into the room to place some flowers on the bed, and found that the coins had been removed. I heard next morning that she had been taken up by the police, drunk on four-ale, outside the public-house at the end of our lane.

When I reflected on how my poor wife, burthened as she was, had acted towards this stranger, I could not find that in his dying words about her he had spoken more than the truth. She had indeed showed herself an angel. She was at his service night and day. I can see her still sitting by his bedside wiping the cold perspiration from his face and neck. Her voice had never sounded more musical than when she was speaking to the poor dying poet. He used to put out his gaunt hand at times and touch her dress. She read to him, she played to him, she sang gentle songs which brought the tears to his eyes. She managed things so that he never once, I believe, suspected that our poor hospitality was far beyond our means. A few days before he died she carried her wedding-ring, for which she had an almost superstitious reverence,



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to the pawnshop. Something was wanted for him which could otherwise not have been procured. Consumption is a befouling malady, yet she never betrayed repugnance at the tasks which were laid upon her in consequence. The washing of those dreadful sheets must have been real martyrdom to a woman of her temperament. She showed throughout the heroism and the self-sacrifice of a Sister of Charity, and the more loathsome the duty the greater cheerfulness she displayed in performing it.

The funeral was well attended. Many notable writers were there, and not a few employers of literary labour. With some of these I had been in relation by correspondence, and when they saw how poorly I was lodged, they said to themselves—I fancy so, at least, from what I afterwards experienced—that a writer who could earn so little by his pen must be a man of very small literary merit indeed. The replies which I later received to my offers of work, and the terms which were forced on my acceptance could not be explained on any other ground.

It did not surprise me. I knew that when a man is down his fellows delight in the circumstance, that far from doing anything to help him to his feet they



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take a malicious pleasure in adding to the burden that crushes him to the earth. I knew that poetic justice is not of this earth. Yet, for my poor wife's sake, I could have wished that this act of kindness to a stricken stranger might have led to brighter fortune. It tore my heart to see how our life was wasting her radiant beauty, killing her youth, and ploughing furrows on her cheeks.



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CHAPTER VIII.

THAT day we had dined on tea without milk, dry bread, and a kippered herring. It was about four months after the death of our friend. I had a shilling in my pocket, which was needed for my return fare to town. That morning I had received a letter from a publisher, asking me to come and see him, and to arrange about some work which he wished to give me. We sweetened the dour repast by hoping that something might be paid on account.

"I would like to get your mattress out of pawn," said my wife.

"Never mind my mattress," I said. "I want you to get proper food. You are white with privation."

She smiled adorably.

"Privation?" she cried. "When I have you?"

The work that was proposed to me that afternoon was important, the translation and annotation of some French Memoirs—ten big volumes. Payment



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was offered at the rate of a halfpenny the line, and ten pounds were to be paid on account on signing the agreement, with a promise of further advances as the work progressed. I could hardly master my emotion on hearing that there was such a sum to be received at once, and held out a trembling hand for the pen. A few minutes later I left the office with ten dusty volumes under my arm, and ten golden sovereigns in my waistcoat pocket. I hurried towards Charing Cross, determined that my first purchase should be for my wife. She should have some flowers to gladden her that night. But when I reached the end of the Strand, I saw that the road was blocked. A great concourse of people had collected in front of the station, and extended as far as Trafalgar Square. I elbowed my way through the crowd, and being able to show my return ticket to the police, was allowed to enter the station-yard. I had been so taken up with my own concerns that I had not felt any curiosity till then as to the reason of this popular demonstration, or if I thought about it at all, it was to conclude that some royal personage was expected to arrive. Indeed, after I had looked about me, this seemed to be the true explanation,

entrance.

"Who is being expected?"
although my indifference was ex

The gentleman to whom I had
an almost pitying look.

"Surely you don't mean to say
you don't know?"

"I do not, indeed," I said. "The
world, and for the last few days
paper." I did not mention the
abstention.

"Why, the nation's hero is
to-day!" said the man. And he
man."

"Yes," cried a lady, who was
side. "The darling is coming home
one of the Princes is there to meet

"A poor home-coming for such
signed the name."

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there was no other feeling in my heart than one of the deepest sorrow and pity.

A great roar now arose within the station, at once taken up by the excited thousands outside. It increased in volume, and the echoes of it seemed to come from every point of the compass. It was as if all London were shouting welcome. All eyes were fixed on the doorway through which he would appear, and none with more eager straining than mine. Like those around me my thoughts were altogether of the great and brave deeds this man had done, of his splendid service to his queen and country, of the honour which streamed from his achievements upon every one of us, his fellow-countrymen. A great shout of "Here he is!" arose, and then I saw him. Such a deafening, stunning noise of acclaim greeted him as he emerged into the open that he started back, and paused. I had full time to see him well. He was leaning on the arm of one of the princes; the other had his hand on his shoulder, and was guiding his faltering footsteps. He was dressed in soiled khaki, and his sword was at his side. On his broad chest was the Victoria Cross, which he had earned not once but twenty times. His sightless and



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I read the news was that for my poor darling the life of drudgery and humiliation is over, and I was so glad, so very glad. . We will go to Italy, dear, and to Greece, and see all those places that we used to talk about, and planned to see when you had made your fortune. It's made now, is it not? And how overjoyed I am that it should come to you through me."

She looked so radiantly happy, that I could not find it in me to say what it was in my mind to say. She did not notice my gloomy silence, for she talked excitedly all the way home. I was much taken up with very desponding thoughts and did not hear all she said, but I gathered that she was making bright plans for my future. I do not think that she once referred to herself or to the difference which this change of fortune would make to her.

When we reached home, we found another telegram in the letter-box. It was a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields inviting my wife to call on the morrow morning on a matter of great importance. This definite confirmation of the news set the poor girl clapping her hands and dancing about the room. As for me, it killed the last faint hope for my future happiness.



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"Well, dear," I said, after a while, "you have twenty-five thousand pounds and I, I have ten pounds. Here they are. Or stay—I will give you five pounds to go on with. I may have an urgent use for the rest."

"You must send that money back with those dreadful-looking books, dear," she said. "Do you think that I am going to let you slave at work of that kind now, and at a halfpenny a line? No, all that belongs to the hideous past. These solicitors will surely advance me a hundred pounds or so to-morrow, and to-morrow evening we will say "good-bye" to Catford for ever. But before we go I should like to arrange to have a stone put on the poor poet's grave. We will see about it as soon as I have the money, won't we?"

"However rich I might become," I said, "I could not live a life of idleness, and I think that I will keep this work. It will interest me. And so we will keep the ten pounds. For we need supper, and there is not a penny in the house."

"I had quite forgotten that," cried my wife, with a ringing laugh. "Isn't it funny? Here are we, people with twenty-five-thousand-pounds, and we have not a penny in the house! I'll run out at



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once, and get the materials for such a supper as you like. Will you lay the cloth, dear, while I am gone?"

As soon as the house-door had closed behind her I sat down on my bed and covered my face and groaned aloud. Truly fate was hard upon me. It could not even leave me to enjoy what poor little contentment I had been able to derive from the miserable life which I had been leading. What contentment there had been had come from the society of the one being I loved on earth. And now! Either I must condemn her to pass the rest of her existence amidst the squalid miseries from which I never should emerge or, blind to every sense of honour, I must share with a woman who was my wife in nothing but name, a fortune which was hers alone. As long as she had been dependent on me for protection, for shelter, and for the necessities of life, my affection had passed over what was repugnant to me in our association. How would it be, how should I look, how should I feel, if, the rôles being changed, it was I who depended on her not for the bare necessities of existence but for an idle and luxurious life? I should be pointed at with the finger of scorn as a complacent husband



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who found his wife's dishonour easy to swallow when gilded with twenty-five thousand pounds. It would be whispered abroad that if I had passed over her offence it was with the certitude that sooner or later she would become rich. But, to tell the truth, the opinion of the world mattered little to me, weighed little or not at all in the balance that I held. It was myself, it was my own feelings, my own sense of honour that pointed to the only course that it was possible for me to pursue, and the prospect before me was so entirely miserable that the tears rose to my eyes. I could not sentence my wife to eternal privation and drudgery. I could not share her wealth with her. All that remained for me to do was to leave her. She needed my protection no longer. She could dispense with the fine shelter that I afforded her, the roof of a workman's cottage, at a weekly rent. She would not need to still her hunger to share with me the miserable food that all my learning, all my industry alone could provide. I must leave my one friend, the woman whom I loved with every fibre of my being. Cruel! Cruel! Cruel!

She returned laden with provisions, and busily set to work to prepare our evening meal. It was to

was the last time, the very last time
would break bread together. I summoned
my fortitude to conceal the despair
feigned to be happy, to be excited as
had procured all the things we like
special brand of champagne, caviar
breads, and asparagus, and other
decked the table out with flowers and
the sideboard laid a couple of cigars
smoke with my coffee and liqueur
should I be entertained in the day
could only swallow one reminiscence
as the feast was of my providing, I
as I sat down with her to the banquet
I could eat little, and in spite of the
intensity of my grief at last betrayed

She looked at me with the saddest

"I know, dear," she said, "that
have been much happier to-day than

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She sat late with me that night, and talked of the future. The part that I was constrained to play revolted my sense of honesty. At every moment she was asking me questions, consulting me as to the plans to be decided on. I tried to answer as though I took great interest in the matter. For I had determined that she should only learn my decision after I had gone.

We parted, as we had always done for the last two years, with a warm handgrip and some kindly words. "Good night, dear, and God bless you," were the very last words I heard her say. I followed her to the door and watched as she glided up the staircase. As she reached the corner where it turned, she looked back and kissed her hand to me. The hand was red and rough, and the nails were broken.

A wild impulse came to me to hold out my arms and call her to them; but it was the sight of that little hand so deformed that checked the impulse. No, I would not sentence her to a life of drudgery. She should take her fortune, and I should go and trouble her no more.

It was arranged that she was to go up to Town the next morning, and after seeing the solicitors

it was I who had insisted on this a
which would facilitate the step I had
taking. A letter should reach her in
when she was in the midst of friends at

I did not sleep that night, but when t
came I feigned to be asleep. I could
ordeal of another parting from her.

into my room, singing gently. I hear
about the house. She was laying out m
It was striking eight as she left the hous
stroke of the clock seemed to me lik
hammer-blow. I listened with straini
the pit-pat of her tiny feet as it died a
distance. Silence came all too soon, a
my bosom in an agony of despair, I crie
—"Alone ! Alone ! Alone !"



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CHAPTER IX.

THERE is in Brittany, not very far from the town of Quimperlé, a village called Pont-Aven, which is much frequented by painters. Writers of books, who cling to the superstition that good work can be produced in the tedious circumstances of country-life, visit it also. The village, with its quaint cottages, the fishing-boats on the tidal river, its orchards and meadows, is a place of some beauty. But what more than this accounts for its popularity with landscape painters, and the even needier race of writers, is that the cost of living there is perhaps lower than in any part of France, and certainly much lower than anywhere in England. For less than fifteen shillings a week a man gets a bedroom, in one of the two inns in the village, and three meals a day, from which no luxury is wanting. Such also is the simplicity of the inhabitants, remote as they are from what is called the world, that they can hardly conceive



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dishonesty in strangers, however much they may mistrust each other.

The poet who had died in our house had often spoken to me of this place, and when I determined to flee from my wife, my thoughts at once reverted to what he had said about it. It was out of the world. I should be away from anything that could recall the past. I had a grinding task of literary work to perform. The cost of my living would be provided for.

To get to Pont-Aven from London, one travels by way of Southampton to St. Malo, and there takes train to Quimperlé or Lorient. It is a long and fatiguing journey. When I reached St. Malo on the morrow of the day on which I had seen my wife for the last time, I felt so exhausted that I decided to break the journey there.

I needed rest badly. A rough passage from Southampton had shaken me so, nervous wreck that I was, that after I had landed on the quay, I stood for some minutes trembling and shaking. My bag slipped from my moist palm, and for fear of falling, I leaned against one of the posts of the landing-shed. An English clergyman, who had crossed with me, pointed me out to his son. I



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heard him say : "Look at that degrading spectacle, Ernest, and try to profit by it. That man is on the verge of *delirium tremens*, if what we see is not the *aura* of epilepsy. Yet he drank during the night—I made a point of counting them—not less than four glasses of the finest French brandy."

The charitable and reverend gentleman was in the right. I had taken the quantity of alcohol which he mentioned. I do not think that without it I could have lived through the passage.

An incident came to rouse me. A lad offered to carry my bag into the town, and had already picked it up, when another of the loafers on the quay—a big fellow—rushed up, and snatching the bag from the boy's hand, pushed him aside so roughly that he fell to the ground. He was a weakly lad, and the fall hurt him, and he began to cry. This seemed to whip up my energy, for I sprang forward and wrested my property from the ruffian's hand, and restored it to the boy. "Come along, my lad," I said, "and don't cry." The boy shouldered the bag, but he had not gone more than twenty yards when he was forced to put it down. He was half-starved. This vastly amused the loafers on the quay. Another instance, it



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occurred to me, of the tender mercies of mankind. The bag was a heavy one, for it contained several books. Little else, I may add. "Come along with me, my poor little fellow," I said, picking it up. "You can show me the way, and I will pay you just the same."

After passing through the fortified gateway into the Grande Rue, I began to look about for lodgings. In the state of my purse, I could not think of going to an hotel, for the season was then beginning in the three towns, and prices were very high. Passing up the quaint High Street, a narrow thoroughfare leading between lofty, two-century old houses to the cathedral with its towering spire, my eye was caught by a notice of "Room to let," in a small grocer's shop on the right. Mustering up my courage, for in my nervous state it was a veritable ordeal for me to address a stranger, I entered the shop.

The grocery-woman was sitting near the door, engaged on a large basket of gherkins, trimming off their stems, rubbing them on her apron, and throwing them into a large tub, into which now and again she ladled a handful of rock-salt. What energy for what a purpose, I thought.



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The woman was laughing with a slatternly gossip as I entered, and still laughing in a very pleasant manner, she said—

“Here I am at my pickles.”

I now noticed, first, that she was rather untidy in her dress, and next that she had beautiful blue eyes. Beautiful, because they looked so good. They reminded me a little of—

“Come along,” said she, when I had explained my business. “The room is on the third floor. It’s not my room. It belongs to the woman who rents that floor. I put that card in my window to oblige her. I am always obliging people.”

She then led me through the back-shop, which was in an indescribable state of disorder, and up a winding staircase, very steep, very foul, and very dark.

“It hasn’t been washed since the house was built,” she explained.

A thick greasy rope hung down along the central post of the staircase to help people to climb the steep stairs, and to guide them in the darkness. One would never want for the rope to get out of all this, was my reflection as I mounted. The room that was to let pleased me very much. It had two

Virgin, before which votary candles burned all night. The light was very good. There was a big table in the middle of the room, well set out, firm and steady, and on the chest of drawers a fine lamp with a green shade.

"Just the room to write in," I said.

"Here's a gentleman for your room," said the grocery-woman, introducing me to the landlady, a spare, dyspeptic-looking young female.

"It's forty francs a month," said she.

"And the rent is payable in advance," said the groceress. "Oh, yes," she added, speaking fast and with a visible effort to look sensible, "that is an absolute condition. The room must be taken for a fortnight. Attendance is extra; twopence the hour."

The landlady nodded approval of the conditions, and also, as it seemed to me, of the trenchant way in which they had been stated.

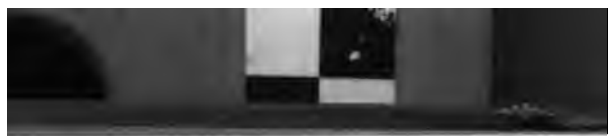
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to play at being suspicious and exacting when one's nature ignored such feelings. "And," I added, looking at the landlady, "a soured young female who would like to make even ampler use of her brief authority."

"It's all right," I said at last. "Take your sixteen shillings out of this sovereign, and give that lad a franc for not carrying my bag."

As soon as the women had left me to the "enjoyment" of my new abode, I began to unpack my bag, and to arrange my things. My table, on which I spread my writing materials, occupied my special attention. I had a weakness for stationery, and laid out a quantity of manuscript paper and notebooks in symmetrical arrangement. A little tray was filled with pencils of different colours of chalk. There were two inkpots, one with red and the other with black ink, a number of quill pens and other implements of my sorry craft. I next placed on the table a portrait, which I had pressed again and again to my lips before I set it down.

Then, my new surroundings having given the usual fillip to my energy, I sat down and, taking up the volume of the Memoirs on which I was engaged, I drew a piece of paper towards me.



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But after I had written three or four lines, I laid my pen down again. "It's no use trying to work to-day," I cried, rising to my feet, wearily, "my head is empty, my hands tremble. I cannot keep my eyes off her dear face. I had better go and look at the town, and I suppose I ought to try and eat something." Since the "royal feast" nothing had passed my lips.

Before my troubles came upon me, a walk through the curious old town, with its narrow, winding streets, its mediæval houses, the religious statues at the street-corners, and above all the ramparts or town-wall, which gird the city, would have pleased and interested me. As it was, all things were indifferent to me. I walked among men, as though I were not of them, as if I were outside the world, and not of it. As I passed in front of the grocery-shop, the widow, who was beaming in the narrow doorway, cried out after me—

"One is going to lunch," and added in English, "Plenty eat."

I nodded my head, and as I walked away I said to myself, "I am afraid that good woman with her pretence of good humour, which of course is only



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part of her stock-in-trade, will be a very trying neighbour. I hope she won't shout after me every time I pass. My nerves won't stand it. I know you, my good woman," I added, looking back. "You are just like all the rest. You smirk and smile because you want to get something out of me, and, having got it, you would be hard and cruel and scowl instead of beaming."

After wandering about the streets for some time, without being able to muster up the courage to enter an eating-house, for my nervous state was such that it was a real physical suffering to me to be in a strange place, or to talk to strange people, I came at last to a little café, which seemed empty of customers, and which looked quiet and respectable. In the window was a notice that one could lunch inside for one shilling. An appetising smell came through the open door. As I entered, I noticed a very stout woman, who was standing in the kitchen off the public-room. She was raising a bottle to her mouth. This, it appeared, was the landlady. She had a very red, flushed face, and she also beamed. She spoke bad English, and insisted on speaking it, although I addressed her in French. She was very loquacious,



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and whilst serving the *déjeuner*, plied me with questions, and imparted undesired information.

"Julie Bron's," she said. "You have got into that house, have you? I'm sorry for you. It's a drinking lot. Her husband, the grocer, killed himself with spirits. He died last year. She drinks too. Why, you can see it in her face, puffy and flushed. Now, why don't you come here? It's a nice house, and there's a view of the sea from the bedrooms. And I charge only tenpence a meal to my boarders. I have a sailor or two, and some very nice girls."

Then, to my horror and dismay, she called through the kitchen door—

"I say, Marie; come here, Marie."

"For goodness sake, madame," I cried, starting to my feet, "don't call any very nice girl. I don't feel well. I might have a fit."

The fat hostess laughed.

"Don't be frightened," she said, "Marie won't eat you, my dear. Marie-la-Blonde, we call her. I wanted you to see her. You look like a photographer, and she's such a fine girl that she is really worth looking at. Why, the man goes white and red! Well, she isn't coming. Gone



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out, probably; so sit down, and take your coffee."

"After all," I thought, mournfully, "what right have I to feel such horror for Marie-la-Blonde? Probably Marie-la-Blonde could give a better excuse than . . ." And my heart grew heavy at the prospect before me, a long, lonely, loveless life, in the course of which my solitude might drive me to seek such abhorred society. "If I ever get well and strong again," I thought, "I may find myself coming here."

The hostess, having poured out the little glass of spirits which was given with my cup of black coffee, filled herself a large tumbler of the same, and with one hand on her hip drank it slowly. One eye she firmly closed, with the other, squinting, she watched the decreasing contents of her glass. Standing thus, she was the very picture of coarse and carnal sensuality, rejoicing in immediate satisfactions. As I looked at her my disgust gave way to a feeling which was akin to envy. Here was a human being, of about the same age as myself, who had grown fat and rubicund in life, who seemed to feel enjoyment in every movement. Whilst I—— But the woman,



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no doubt, had had in her life no such catastrophe as had wrecked me body and soul. I asked her—

“Are you married, madam?”

“Married!” she cried, setting down her tumbler with a gasp of satisfaction. “Lor’ bless you, yes. I couldn’t live without a husband,” she added, with a fat and unctuous smirk. “And the man I have got now is my fourth.”

“And did not all those deaths upset you dreadfully?”

“Deaths! Who said my men were dead? The first two bunked off when they had had enough of me, and it was I who took French leave of the third, a pudding-faced Guernseyman he was. Upset! I like that! One go, the other come. I don’t worry about others. I think of myself, and I keep jolly.” Then she added, “You take my advice and give up your room at Julie Bron’s, and come here. I’ll make you feel at home.”

“Not wild horses,” I muttered, as I got out into the street again, “shall drag me there. But, alas, are there not forces stronger than the wildest?” And, as I walked along, I implored the powers to let me rather sink out of sight than come to seek relief from my lonely misery in such company.



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As I passed the grocery, I saw Madame Bron talking to a beggar who was blocking up her doorway.

He was hideously deformed. She was speaking harshly, and I heard her say, "It's quite useless for you to stand there showing your ailments. I have nothing to give you. I give nothing away at the door."

"I am in great misfortune," whined the beggar. "I feel great pain."

"Every one feels his own pains," said an elderly woman, coming out of the darkness of the shop. "Every one feels his own pains," she repeated, "and every one does the best he can for himself. Those who are deformed must straighten their limbs as best they can. See what is the best that you can do for yourself. We can do nothing for you."

I never could see misfortune, without trying to alleviate it. So I stepped up to the beggar and presented him with a franc and then, without listening to his thanks, I passed into the passage leading to the staircase. I felt so tired that before climbing those very steep stairs, I halted for a moment, leaning against the central post. As I



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was standing there I heard the women in the shop speaking about me.

"Who is that man?"

It was obviously the old lady who was speaking.

"That's Madame Durand's new lodger," said Julie. "An Englishman, mother-in-law."

"I don't like the English. And what an untidy-looking man!"

"I don't think that he is very well. He looks as if he had great trouble," said Julie.

"Hard-up is the better word for it. Now, Julie, don't let him do you. Don't give him any credit."

"He's not likely to ask for it. He's only here for a fortnight, and he has paid in advance."

"Well," said the old lady, in a changed voice, "I have warned you. I know the world, and you don't, and I can tell a man at a glance. He don't look honest." She was munching something as she spoke, and I presumed she had let her hand stray into one of the jars full of sugar-plums which were standing on the counter. "And now," she added, "put me up a quarter of a pound of your best coffee, and pick me out three of your freshest eggs. There is nothing more for me to do here,



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and I am going back to my lodgings. And do try and get some sweetbreads for lunch to-morrow. My teeth get tenderer and tenderer every day, and on those steaks which you buy and which I am unable to masticate, I see no chance of getting back my health. Oh, by-the-way," she continued, doubtless whilst her daughter-in-law was doing up her parcel, "I've taken a few coppers out of the till. I want snuff and a few other little things, and my annuity won't be due for some weeks."

"Take—take what you like," said the grocery-woman.



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CHAPTER X.

I DID not leave my room again until late in the evening. I spent the whole of the afternoon seated in my armchair, doing nothing, chewing the bitter cud of my despair. Of late I had often so found myself, sitting for hours together with the apathy and inertness of very old men, and I could realise now how, after great catastrophes in life, men and women could resign themselves to the seclusion of a monastic cell. One lay down like a wounded animal and waited, just waited. One hoped for nothing, one desired nothing, one tried for nothing, one waited, just waited. Even as in the body there is an immense reserve of resistance to pain, so also is there in the mind, to mental sorrow, provided one just sits and waits. On this reserve force Napoleon drew during the long years of his agony in St. Helena.

It was not until the illuminated clock at the end of the street was marking nine o'clock that it occurred to me that it was usual, and indeed was



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considered necessary for people to take some food at that hour of the day, and though the sensation of appetite was as much lacking to me as any other sensation, I set out to feed my cumbersome body. Casting my eyes about me, after I had walked a little while, I found to my horror that my unconscious footsteps were leading me to the house where I had taken lunch that morning. "I suppose," I cried, "that my indifference had choked all remembrance of my disgust, but I vow I never meant or wanted to go there."

I was passing a baker's shop at the time, and it suggested itself to me that I could purchase there all that was necessary to satisfy Nature's absurd but indisputable requirements. So I went in and purchased a penny loaf and a halfpenny cake of chocolate. But as I came out with these things in my hands, and a sort of wonder upon me as to what I was going to do with them, I saw a very little boy and a very big dog. The boy was crying; he had just picked himself up off the ground. The dog, who was terribly lean, was rummaging in a rubbish-heap with feverish energy. I laughed. "The solution of my puzzle presents itself," I said, and gave the chocolate to



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the little boy and the bread to the big dog. "Having completed my supper arrangements," I said to myself, "I may as well go for a walk." So I walked up to the gate of St. Peter in the town-wall, and passing under it descended to the beach. It suggested itself to me dimly that the view of the bay of St. Malo, with the lights of the yachts lying at anchor and the blaze of the villas of Dinard and St. Enogat beyond, seen under the stars, might be very beautiful and a sight that it was in my nature to enjoy. But in this respect also I was numbed. I lay down on the sand and listened to the sea, and thought of my wife and wondered vaguely what effect my letter, which must have reached her by that time, had had upon her. But though I groped after a sensation, none even faintly manifested itself. All that I felt was that the sand was damp and the air rather cold. Still I lay there, as inert as I had been in the armchair an hour previously. It was the advancing tide that forced me at last to rise and go away. I knew that it couldn't drown me, because, of course, danger would make me swim, and I did not wish to get wet. Nature and people were terribly tiresome, making one get up and



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move and do things. Nature was the worse of the two. When again I found myself outside the house in the Grande Rue, the shop was closed and the house door was locked. I then remembered that I had no latchkey. I knocked several times, but nobody came. It amused me to find that nobody came. Only a few minutes previously I had been complaining of people's fussiness. Now here nobody interfered with me. I was left entirely to myself; the house door was a model of apathetic indifference, and yet I was not satisfied. I was turning away with some vague idea of returning to the beach to spend the night on the sand, when I heard steps and the sound of laughter. Then the door was opened and I saw Julie Bron in a white dressing-gown, barefooted, her hair tumbled, and her eyes heavy with sleep. She was laughing heartily, as if it were a splendid joke to be roused out of bed after a working-day of eighteen hours to come downstairs and let in another person's lodger. I apologised for my neglect, but she only laughed the heartier. "Durand, your landlord," she said, "heard you knocking, but he said that he would see himself hanged before he would come



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downstairs in the middle of the night to open the door to any Englishman."

I felt that Durand was a sensible man, but all the same I thanked the widow with much warmth and in bidding her good night outside her bedroom door, which opened on to the staircase, I shook hands with her. Then I began to climb the winding steps which led to my own chamber. I had not passed the second storey, however, before I heard her calling out after me: "Oh, I say, sir," she cried, "you know if you want anything warm to take before you go to bed you had better say so. I have a spirit lamp, and anything that's in the shop——"

"No, no, no," I cried, "I don't want anything, I never take anything before going to bed."

"A good glass of grog?"

"No, thank you," I answered with a laugh, and mounted another step or two.

"A cup of lime-tree leaves tea? Very good for the nerves."

"No, no, thank you. Hang the woman!" I cried as I flung myself into my room. "Why can't she leave me alone? Why will she bother me with her kindness?"

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Then I locked my door, and, too exhausted to undress, flung myself on my bed in my clothes.

When I awoke next morning, I felt pleased that I had taken the precaution not to undress on going to bed, for so the trouble of dressing was now spared to me. However, before that, was the formality of getting up to be performed, but reason with myself as I would, I could not bring myself to see the necessity of doing anything of the kind. My manuscript paper was very nice and white, and looked very neat in its symmetrical heap. It was very well as it was, and why should I disturb it? Again, what could ever have made me fancy that anybody would care twopence to read about the Marquis, Vicomte or Baron, or the Duchesse, Marquise or Comtesse, or their mutual and reciprocal instincts, about which I had proposed to write. They were very well where they were buried in the dust of centuries that were dead. Why should I not leave them where they were? There was the question of money, of course, yet though I recognised that at any time the pressing need of this would have caused me very great anxiety, I felt then no solicitude for my future. Whatever it might be, it could not be worse than



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the present apathy, and even the power to suffer would be an improvement on my condition.

At three o'clock that afternoon, Julie Bron found me still lying on my bed. She asked me if I were ill, with great concern in her voice.

"No," I answered, irritably. "There's nothing the matter with me—only very tired."

"But you mustn't lie there like that," she cried. "You have eaten nothing all day, and if you go on like that you really will get ill."

"Oh, it's pleasant to lie here!" I said with a laugh. "I listen to the street cries, and they amuse me. Why are they all so sad? The woman who wants crockery and straw-bottomed chairs to mend sings a real dirge, and there is a most lugubrious rag-merchant. He wails out the query, 'Have you any rags to sell, up there, mesdames?' like a funeral chant. I can't help thinking by the way that there is a rag up here to sell, a human rag. But I don't suppose that he would give anything for it."

Julie made no comment on this remark.

"No," she said. "You can't remain without food. You must get up and come downstairs, and I'll give you a bowl of splendid bouillon and boil



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you a couple of new-laid eggs. In the meanwhile Madame Durand can make your bed and sweep the room."

I was not sorry that at last I accepted her pressing invitation, for the meal which she served me was the best I had had for a long time, and for once I felt that my food was doing me good. The bouillon was delicious, and filled me with liquid life. Certainly, the surroundings might have been more cheerful. The back-shop, which had no window, and was indeed only a space partitioned off from the front, was lighted by the tiniest jet of gas. It was in great disorder, with packing-cases, dirty bottles and foul linen lying about. Next to the little range was a malodorous dustbin. Instead of a cloth, a newspaper was spread on the table.

Just as I had finished my meal, the errand-boy brought in a large cut of Gruyère cheese and placed it on the table.

"He doesn't expect me to eat all that," I said, trying to laugh.

Julie explained.

"No, it's for me to fix up." Then she produced a rag and a little pot of some reddish mixture, and began daubing the white rind of the cheese a ruddy



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brown colour. "They won't buy it if it isn't browned," she said. "They find it far superior when it has got this bit of colour on it."

"But isn't that adulteration?" I asked.

"Oh, no! I don't alter the quality of the cheese. I only dress it up to suit the taste of my customers. You see, I know my trade. My husband taught me, and he knew how to work. He knew his business. He was a real grocer, not a mere tradesman who sells grocery. Ah, if he hadn't drunk himself to death, he might have gone far."

"Yes, I have heard something about the cause of his death," I said. "And you say he drank too much?"

"Yes, he killed himself with it. Cirrhosis of the liver, the doctors called the end. He died quite quietly one day at noon. I had been up to see him, and I said to him, 'Paul, are you suffering?' and he said, 'No, Julie, only at the thought of all the wrong I have done you.' Then I kissed him, and he gave a sigh and he was dead."

"I presume that the lady whom I saw with you yesterday," I said, to change the subject, for the tears were running down the widow's cheeks, "was your mother-in-law?"

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“Yes. She came to St. Malo about two years ago, a year before Paul died. He had seen very little of her before, for Madame Bron is a very selfish person—very selfish. Everybody has his own character, you know. She had misfortunes as a young woman. Her husband was in the wine-trade, and not only ruined himself but spent all her dowry. And then he got paralysed. She says she could not bear to have to share her bed with a paralysed man, and often used to push him out on the floor, where he lay helpless. In the end she deserted him. The children had been put out long before then. She went off to Canada with a man who had a patent for a manure-pump. But neither the pump nor the patentee were much good, and she eventually drifted back to France. Here she got into the service of an old judge, and he seems to have become attached to her, for when he died, eighteen months later, he left her an annuity of twenty-four pounds a year, which is her present income. In the meanwhile, she had heard that Paul was married and in business, and so she came down here to live with us. She has a room in the town, and comes here for an hour or two to help at the cash-desk, and has her dinner here. I send



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her her breakfast in the morning and a newspaper every night."

Suffering as I was from morbid altruism, it occurred to me that the old lady might be an example to study with advantage.

"Will she come to supper?" I asked.

"No. She says she is delicate, and can eat little at night-time."

"Oh, yes!" cried the errand-boy. "Delicate! That story about having only one meal a day is to excuse the enormous amount she eats here at noon. I know better. When I take her her paper at nights, she gets me to empty her rubbish-pail on to the dust-heap downstairs, and where do all the bones come from, and the snail and oyster-shells, if she doesn't have a good feed at nights?"

"Well, well," said Julie. "She certainly worships her stomach."

A customer here entered the shop, and she left to attend to him. She returned the moment after, and said—

"He wants a bottle of wine. It's an Englishman. Would you be so good," she said to me, "to reach me down one of those bottles with the blue seal? It's the claret I sell at a shilling to

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strangers, though its real price is only sevenpence."

When she had served the customer, she came back rattling the coins in her hand gleefully, and cried out—

"Fivepence which have fallen from the skies. They'll pay for our supper to-night."

"But is that quite fair?" I asked.

"It's business. People who are not in trade do not understand these things. Besides, I need every penny I can get, for I have all my husband's debts to pay. I couldn't be forced to pay them, you know, because six months before his death we made an arrangement with our creditors, and the shop was sold back to me personally, under my sister's name, and I am not responsible for any of his debts. I got from the court what we call in France a separation of estates. But all the same, I don't want anybody to feel that he was wronged by my husband, and I am paying back what I can. It's very hard, and only a day or two ago, I received a letter about a debt of a thousand francs of which I knew nothing. I cried all night over the letter."

I looked at her with more attention. What a



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curious mixture of qualities, I thought, there is in this untidy, red-faced little woman? As a tradeswoman she is as dishonest as her class, but as private Julie Bron she cries all night because her feeling of honour compels her to pay a debt for which she is not in the least responsible.

"Nothing punishes me more," continued the widow, "than not to pay people. For myself, I care nothing about money. My expenses are very small. You see what a scarecrow I look. Well, I never bought a new dress since my marriage. My rent comes to about one and eightpence a day, and tenpence covers our food. I never go out. I haven't been outside the town-walls for years. I never take any pleasure. All I earn goes towards paying off my husband's debts. I have just settled with a jeweller. My husband got in love with one of the women who sing at the concert round the corner, and there was a bracelet and other things to be paid for. Ah, I have had a fine struggle for the past year!"

"You seem to work very hard," I said, "and you seem to like working."

"I have been a worker all my life," said Julie. "My parents were poor people. My father was in

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a shipbuilding-yard. What do you call those people who ram oakum between the planks of ships? They were too poor to pay for my school-books, paper and so on, and when I was nine years old I used to knit stockings coming and going to school to earn enough for these things. At the age of thirteen I got a place as a shopgirl at a draper's shop, and out of the thirty francs I used to earn a month, I gave fifteen to my parents. I paid for my mother's last illness, and for her funeral. Yet when I was twenty-eight I had six-hundred francs in the savings bank. It was very useful, for when I married I had to buy the wedding-ring and pay for Paul's wedding-suit. No, I care nothing about money for myself. If I could get together fifteen hundred pounds, I'd retire to the country and be the happiest woman in France, with a little cottage and a garden and poultry to rear. However, I am not likely to realise that project on this side of the grave. You can have no idea how hard it is for a woman to be in trade all by herself, without capital to go on with. My mother-in-law keeps telling me that I ought to take a protector, and there are plenty of rich men here who have offered to help me on



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those terms. But that disgusts me. No, that thing was never my strong point, and I have a great contempt for women who go wrong. There's no excuse for it. When I tell my mother-in-law so, she laughs, and says that I am a fool, and adds that she wishes that she could get a chance. I believe that she still hopes to. There's an old man here, a very rich shipowner, and he's a baron—a real baron—who is always running after me. He says, 'I have never courted a woman, as I have courted Julie Bron, and she has never favoured me.' I could get any money I wanted from him on his terms. But, no thank you! I have always kept straight, and I always will."

I said nothing. I was thinking of my wife, who, with all her grace and beauty and wit and elegance, showed so poorly by the side of this slatternly little woman of the people with the blue eyes and high cheekbones and red face.

"Of course," she continued, "the neighbours all say that if I have been able to carry on this business after my husband's death, and in the state in which our affairs were left, it is because I have got some man to back me on the usual conditions. But I let them talk."

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Supper-time found me still sitting in the shop. I was interested in Julie Bron's self-revelations, and in the intervals of conversation it amused me to watch the customers, to see what they bought and to listen to what they said. Most of the purchases were by ha'porths, a herring, a ha'porth of pickles, or a ha'porth of sweets were most frequently asked for, but brandy was also in large demand. Little mites of children kept coming in for penn'orths of spirits, and sometimes offered an old bottle in lieu of cash. Credit was much solicited, and it was amusing to observe Madame Bron's conduct on such occasions. At first she would refuse with noisy indignation, abuse of improvidence and disorder, but in the end, in almost every case, she would give in and, still grumbling, supply what had been asked for.



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CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning, Julie brought my breakfast up to my bedside, and with it a letter from England. It was a letter from my wife, addressed to the publisher's office, and forwarded thence.

I had arranged with these people to send on my letters, but had exacted a promise that my address should be given to nobody.

"Dearest," she wrote, "How can you, how can you treat me like this? How can I live separated from you whom I now love better than I have ever loved you? What is to become of me? I do not understand what you say about not wishing to share my money with me. To whom does it belong, if not to my husband? Did you not share all that you had with me? Is it not my turn now? But if you indeed feel about this money, as you say, at a word from you I will tell the solicitors that I refuse the legacy. I would do so if it were



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twenty times as large, if its acceptance meant that I was to be separated from you. Is it that you wish to punish me for the thing that happened so long ago, that I sometimes wonder if it is true that it ever happened? If that is so is it not cruel on your part to punish me after two long years, during which I thought that I was forgiven? No, I won't say that you are cruel, for you are not. You are good, and that is why I want to be with you. How can you live all alone, my poor darling, and who will care for you if you put me away from you? Your letter drove me frantic. I wanted to rush off to London at once to seek for you, but I am frightened to be alone and unhappy in the big town. Remember that on that never-to-be-forgotten night when you showed yourself so noble, you said that suffering should not come to me, in punishment of my fault, from you. What more horrible suffering can you inflict upon me than to desert me now, when I need you more than ever? I repeat, I care nothing for this money if it is to stand between us, and at a word from you I will come back to you as poor as I was before. But if you do not return to me, I will use it, to the last penny if necessary, to find you."



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I was sorely tempted to rush out to the telegraph-office and to send her a message, that I would come back to her, if she came to me empty-handed. I did so want to be with her again. I began to ask myself whether I was acting rightly in leaving her to face the world alone. She was young, she was pretty, she was frail. To what new temptation, to what new pitfall might I not be exposing her? I hesitated in sore perplexity. It was the return of the grocery-woman which decided me. As I looked at the poor, shabby, labour-ravaged woman and remembered all that she had told me, first as to the dreadful struggle she had to make to earn a living, and secondly, as to the solicitations by which even she was constantly tempted, I felt that, suffer as I must, I could not and would not sentence my wife to poverty. She was far less fitted than this woman to fight the world; she had neither her energy nor her commercial cunning, nor, alas, had she the stern principles which had kept Julie pure and virtuous. It was as clear as daylight that it was to my wife's best interests to keep her fortune, and that being so, it was my duty to keep away from her.

So, with a heavy heart, I penned a note to her.



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"Dearest," I wrote, "All my thanks for your good letter. I *cannot* return now. But I do not despair of being able to do so some day, when we will be happy again, as we were before all these dreadful things happened. You must keep your money, and I, on my side, hope to get rich. I should like when I return to you not to have to depend on you, dear. I am very unhappy away from you, more unhappy than you could perhaps believe, and so you may be sure that I will do all in my power to end this terrible separation."

I was about to close this letter, when it occurred to me that she would certainly write to me again, and that her appeal might find me less firm in the determination to do right. Her letters would be the only joy that life could offer me still and I must forego them. I added the following lines—

"Do not answer this letter, dear, for it would not reach me. I am going on a long journey. It is necessary for the plans I have made, the plans which I hope will lead me back to fortune and to you."

In former days I had often spoken to her of a



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wish I had to go to one of the English colonies, and to practise at the Bar there. I hoped she would believe that I was putting this project into execution.

After I had despatched this letter to the care of my publishers, to be forwarded to my wife, and was returning, in a very melancholy state of mind towards the Grande Rue, I was met by Emile, the errand-boy, who had come after me with a message from the grocery-woman.

"There's a chicken roasting, she says," he told me, "and if you prefer to dine with her instead of going to a restaurant, she would like you to come. And you're not to be long, as the mother-in-law has come with a huge appetite, and she's scolding because it ain't ready."

I think that what decided me to accept this invitation was a desire to make more ample acquaintance with the old lady, whose entire selfishness it might benefit me to study. Suffering always by and through others, why should I not try to learn that pleasant and useful egotism which seemed to steel people against such wounds as were killing me. I did not see then what I know now that the morbid condition from which I was



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suffering was only the direct result of egotism carried to its extremest limits. My malady proceeded altogether from the concentration of my thoughts on my suffering *Ego*. If I had not thought of my disease, I should not have been ill.

The mother-in-law received me in a most amiable manner, and smirked and smiled and coquetted in a senile fashion. She was evidently proud of her conversational powers, and detailed to me the contents of her evening paper. When I tried to take some part in the conversation, she immediately became abstracted, and though she now and again interjected an impatient, "Yes, yes," it was obvious that she was not listening.

The chicken was deliciously tender, and was served with some very tasty stuffing, but what enjoyment I might have got out of my meal, for I was feeling for once in appetite, was spoiled by her behaviour. Being the guest I was helped first. A wing and some of the breast were put on my plate. Now, though the old lady had all the rest of the bird at her disposal, for both Julie and the errand-boy dined off the beef with which the soup had been made the day before, she seemed unable to take her eyes off my plate. Whilst eating heartily



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herself, she watched every morsel that I carried to my lips, and it was evident that she considered herself unjustly treated in the distribution of the feast. And so with the wine also, I had been supplied with a bottle of the shilling claret, whilst she, as usual, had her quart of the fivepenny brand, and though, of course, I was paying for my wine, she seemed to grudge me my superior enjoyment very much indeed. Nor did she take any pains to conceal her annoyance.

"What dreadful wine you have given me to-day, Julie," she cried at last. "I am very easy-going, *une bonne bête*, but I won't drink bottle-rinsings to please anybody."

Julie assured her that she was drinking her usual quality, but this did not pacify her, and at last she reached out her glass to me, and said in a very honeyed tone, which contrasted strongly with the expression on her face—

"Will you let me taste your good wine?"

I pushed the bottle over to her, and thus pacified she became amiable once more. However, she kept interlarding her remarks with complaints about her teeth, which she said were so defective as to render it difficult for her to eat anything. In



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spite of which she nearly finished the whole of the chicken and swallowed a full quart of red wine. She then went into the shop, saying, "I always like something sweet to finish my dinner," and provided herself with an assorted plate of sponge-cakes, sweet biscuits, and Narbonne honey. Whilst she was devouring these she harried Emile to make speed with the coffee, and to be careful this time to make it sufficiently strong. Julie's manner towards the old lady was affectionate and respectful, and yet at times, as it seemed to me, she appeared to take pleasure in crossing her, saying little things that irritated her, as though she had some old-standing grievance to satisfy. Mrs. Bron *mère*, however, seemed well able to take her own part. For the rest, she used to relieve her feelings by making a funny grimace behind her daughter-in-law's back whenever Julie had got the best of the discussion. She closed one eye, stuck out her tongue through the corresponding corner of her mouth, and jerked her head forwards and downwards, which seemed greatly to refresh her. I felt certain that the same performance was repeated behind my back also, for more than once I noticed that Julie was greatly amused at



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something that had escaped my attention, and the errand-boy hugely delighted.

Directly she had partaken of her coffee and a liberal allowance of brandy, she made up a miscellaneous parcel of groceries, helped herself to a handful of coppers from the till, and taking some almonds out of a jar to munch on her way home, she departed.

After she had gone, I said to Julie—

“You seem rather fond of teasing your mother-in-law.”

“Oh, there’s no malice in it !” said Julie, laughing. “It is true, though, that I sometimes feel rather sore towards her, and that is on Paul’s account. I think that if the poor fellow had had a better mother, he would never have turned out as he did. But she never loved him. She used to reproach him with the fact that she had spoiled her figure in giving him the breast. A thing which even cats do, as Emile once pointed out to her. And she deserted him when he was quite a child, and he was left to grow up as best he could. If she came to him afterwards, it was to be supported by him. When his wretched drinking habits had destroyed his health and he became very



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ill, she never did anything for him. In fact she wanted me to send him to the hospital or to the lunatic asylum, and constantly urged me to get rid of him in that way. When he was dying, during the last three weeks after he took to his bed, I don't think she went up once to see him. It is true he did not care to see her. And at the moment of his death she was amusing herself here in the back-shop with a squirt, squirting water over the errand-boy. She cooked and ate a pound of steak ten minutes after she had seen his dead body, and explained that if she shed no tears, it was because her grief was too great. She never went upstairs after that first visit, and has not once been to the cemetery. That's all I have against her. What she used to say of me to her son never troubled me. When he complained to her that things were going badly she used to ask him what he could expect after marrying a 'dirty Brittany woman.' But I never felt any grievance against her on that account."

At the end of the fortnight which I had decided to spend in St. Malo, I felt so ill and weak that I could not face another journey. It was indeed an effort to me to go to the end of the street. A



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doctor would have told me that I was suffering from great nervous depression, and that the strong sea-air of St. Malo was much too strong for a person in my exhausted condition. But I consulted no doctor, and began to fancy that the most dreadful physical calamities were hanging over my head. It was neurasthenia pure and simple developed to an acute degree by my morbid egotism. However, I did not realise that at the time, and attributed my disinclination to move to incipient paralysis. The terror of this awful fate haunted me day and night. My languor persisted. I felt unable to walk any distance, indeed this feeling was so strong upon me that at times I doubted my ability to cross the room. I imagined that my right side was much weaker than the left, My arm and leg on that side seemed to me to be hollowed out, and under no control. Later on the fear of blindness seized upon me with equal force. But at that time paralysis was my *idée fixe*. Here the mother-in-law was consoling. She was qualified to speak on the subject, she said, as she laughed at my fears, for she had had paralysis in her family, and a great trial it was too to the patient's friends. "You're as much paralysed as




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I am," she used to say. "For the rest those who are paralysed must deparalyse themselves. It's what I always used to say to my late husband."

Julie, though she pretended to laugh also, was obviously much concerned on my account. She used to say, "If you do become helpless, I will not desert you. I will take care of you. I am a good nurse."

It was very kind of her, no doubt, towards a stranger, but that she should agree with me at times that such a catastrophe was within the limits of possibility used to irritate me, and I received her generous promises with a feeling of impatience. It was not till later, when this scare had passed, that I was able to appreciate to the full her unselfish humanity. And when that time came, I did not reproach myself for the feelings which it had inspired at the time. When a man is in great danger or in great illness, he is like an unreasoning animal, altogether centred on his suffering *Ego*. I read once about a man who was severely bitten by a dog which he was trying to save from drowning.

On the last day of my tenancy of Madame Durand's room, before I had had time to speak to



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her about renewing the engagement, Julie told me that I should have to leave the third-floor, as my landlady wanted the room for a lodger to whom it had been promised before I came. The mother-in-law, who was present, appeared to be in high glee. Indeed, as I learned afterwards, this was a manoeuvre on her part. She was anxious to get rid of me, for she was jealous of Julie's attention to me, and never forgave me the shilling claret. It was she who had urged Madame Durand to give me notice. My landlady was about to leave on a visit to her husband's relatives, and Madame Bron had pointed out to her how very unwise it would be to leave such a lodger alone in her rooms. Were she to commit such an imprudent act, she must not be surprised if, on her return, she found that the lodger had disappeared, and with him the bedding, the clock, and a selection of fancy knick-knacks.

"But you can easily find rooms elsewhere," added the old lady with affected cheerfulness, "and board too, no doubt."

"There's no need for him to leave the house," Julie said, "I can put Paul's room into order, and he can sleep there."

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"*C'est ça,*" cried the mother-in-law, "put him in your own at once? You know what people will say if they hear that he is sleeping on the first floor. They are talking about you two enough already."

I looked at Julie, and noticed on her face the mulish expression which always came there when anybody tried to cross her with violence. That was a characteristic of hers, a characteristic common to the men and women of Brittany, an irreducible obstinacy. As she used to say, speaking of herself, "When I have got something in my head, I haven't got it in my pocket."

The mother-in-law knew the look. She raged.

"After all," she said, "I am very simple to trouble myself about your affairs. It's really only the family reputation that I am thinking of."

With this she flung out of the shop in great indignation.

"About the room," I said nervously. "It really seems that——"

"If I didn't know you," interrupted the grocery-woman. "If I hadn't entire confidence in you, I shouldn't have offered it to you, the room next to mine. But you are much too ill to go anywhere



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else, where people wouldn't look after you properly."

We then went upstairs for me to inspect my new lodgings. The "room in which Paul died" was a gloomy apartment. There were a rosary and other religious emblems hanging on the wall over the bed, and some statuettes of saints on the mantelshelf. An assortment of brooms stood in one corner, and elsewhere other indications that the room was used as a store-room for the shop below. A door, in which there were broken panes of glass, behind which a curtain hung, led into the back-room.

"Paul's work," said Julie, pointing to the broken glass. "Throwing things at me, crockery and boots and things."

"Then he ill-treated you?" I said.

"Oh, dreadfully," said Julie. "During the last three years, it was a literal massacre. I was knocked down, I was dragged about by the hair, I had things thrown at me. In the shop he often threw bottles at my head. My face was cut and my eyes were blackened constantly. I was often awakened in the night by having my face severely slapped and found Paul standing over me with his

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hand raised. He threatened time and again to do for me, and there are a revolver, a loaded cane, and a sword-stick hidden away somewhere. I hid them away so carefully that I have never been able to find them since. He used to see people in my room—for I slept in the back there—and would rush in and drag me out of bed and fling the bed-clothes and the mattresses about screaming out that he knew that there was a man in my bed, and that he meant to find him. Of course, poor fellow, it wasn't his fault. He had lost his reason through drink, and I never felt any grudge against him for his cruelties to me. But when I discovered that he was unfaithful to me, I would have left him, if he had not needed me. He was altogether dependent on me, you see, and if I had gone he would have died in the streets. But I had made up my mind that if he ever got well again and was able to get his own living, I would go where he would never see me again."

"I could not have borne the thought," she added, after a pause, "that people might think that I passed over his misconduct because it was my interest to do so."

After supper was over that evening—I now took



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my meals regularly in the back-shop—I moved my things from the third floor. Now that I was leaving this room, I regretted the fine light and the steady table. It would be difficult to work in the “room in which Paul died,” except by lamp-light. For in despite of my illness and constant feeling of exhaustion I spent so many hours a day at my writing-table. And what troubled me more was the promiscuity of the downstairs room. I found that it had been beautifully tidied by Julie during the day. The brooms and other stores had been moved, and when I asked Emile what had been done with them, the boy said that Madame Bron had carried them in the closet at the back, “where she is going to sleep now. As usual,” he added, “she takes the disagreeables.” As usual. Yes, that was the word. Julie always sacrificed herself for those of whom she was fond. And I could not conceal to myself, not without apprehension, that the widow had developed a considerable degree of attachment for me.

After the shop had been shut for the night, Julie accompanied me to my room, Emile coming with her. She wanted to see if I had everything that I needed.



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"It's much more convenient like this, you see," she said. "For now, if you want anything in the night—supposing you feel poorly—you have only got to call out, and I can come at once. I have brought a spirit-lamp and a kettle, and I can soon warm you up anything. When you were up on the third floor, I was always nervous about you, and have often crept upstairs in the night to listen at your door, fancying I had heard you call out. Mere fancy, of course. Now, I have you at hand."

I laughed nervously.

"Yes, now you have me at hand," I said. Then, after a pause, I pointed to the glazed door in the partition, and added, "Does that door lock?"

"The key has been lost," said Julie. "But I'll get one made."

"Yes, please do," I said.

"Well, good-night," she said. At the door in the partition, she halted, and added, "This is the door through which he came. I don't know how things are in the after-life, but I know that Paul came back to me after his death."

"Oh, this room is haunted, is it?" I said with a laugh.



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"I was lying in bed," she added, "with the candle burning on the table, and he opened the door and came in. He was dressed just as he used to be, in a long blue blouse, and looked, as usual, very neat. And he had a pair of blue spectacles on, such as he used after his eyes got bad. He said, 'Julie, I have come to pay you a visit,' and I said, 'Well, my poor Paul, how are you there where you are? Are you comfortable?' He said, 'I hope you are not in too great difficulties, for, as for me, I can do nothing for you.' And then he put out the light. I screamed, and I jumped up and lit the candle again and found that he had gone. People have often tried to explain the thing to me, but I know that I wasn't dreaming, for how can you explain about the candle?"



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CHAPTER XII.

A certain intimacy had grown up between me and the grocery-woman. My solitude weighed so heavily upon me, for it was part of my weak nature to love society, that I was glad of her company. Her conversation was tedious, perhaps; it always turned on questions of petty financial interests, but at least it was natural, and as it made no call whatever on my brain, it did not fatigue me. There are times when one is glad not to have to think. For the rest, in almost everything that she said, Julie showed herself so good, so unselfish, and endowed with such a humorous tolerance for the faults of others, that I began to conceive a real liking for her. Her kindness to me was astonishing. After the first day or two it had been settled between us that I should take my meals with the family in the back-shop, and indeed but for this arrangement I should often have gone without food altogether, for I felt at times much too exhausted to go out into the town. With



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regard to payment, Julie, who had booked my first meal in the back-shop as, "Lunch, two-shillings; bottle of claret, one shilling; coffee and liqueur, sixpence;" told me that that was written in her capacity as a business woman, "when you were a complete stranger to me," but that she would be very sorry to make such profit out of me. It was accordingly agreed that I should pay twopence halfpenny for my first breakfast, tenpence for my mid-day meal, and fivepence for my supper. Wine was to be an extra, but, said Julie, "I sha'n't lose by charging you sevenpence for the shilling claret." Thus, for about two shillings a day, I found myself boarded at a bountiful table, and when I had accustomed myself to the darkness and untidiness of the back-shop, to the use of old newspapers instead of tablecloths, and various other little inconveniences, my material comfort seemed better assured than it had been for months past. But what benefited me most was the woman's motherly kindness towards me. I needed kindness sorely, weak as I was of body and sore of heart. She was as attentive to me as a hired nurse. She used to tell me that if I would leave it to her she would undertake to cure me.



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At times, however, she would laugh at my illness. It was an imaginary malady, she would say, adding: "You listen to yourself too much." At first, it seemed to me that her amiability towards me might be a womanish manoeuvre to irritate the mother-in-law, in view of the grievance which she had against her. But on observing her, I found that her manner never varied, and that even when Madame Mère was not present she was as amiable and kind as usual. I was at first too inert to wonder at such treatment from a strange woman in a foreign country, and amongst people notoriously egotist; from a woman in quite a different rank of life, with whom I had perhaps not one idea in common; a woman whom I could not amuse nor interest, and who certainly could not find in me, plain, elderly and ravaged as I was, the least physical attraction. But it is in human nature to accept the homage of others with no great feeling of surprise, to feel that after all it is one's due, and to wonder rather that this tribute to one's superiority is only paid by the very few. It may have suggested itself to me at first that here was a business woman, who was not displeased to have a regular customer for her wines and



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groceries, but this suggestion was soon scouted, for it was evident that, as far as I was concerned, Julie had put aside all commercial interests. Even if I had felt mental activity enough to endeavour to solve the problem, it is certain that I could never have succeeded. And this I had to admit to myself later on, when having become more familiar with the woman, my curiosity prompted me to ask : "How came you to be so good to me, almost from the very first?"

"I saw that you were unhappy," she said, "and that was enough. There was a portrait of a very beautiful woman on your writing-table, and I thought that she had perhaps made you suffer. And then I was very fond of my husband and, as I have told you, he used to drink dreadfully. Now, when I saw you so ill, without any real illness to account for your state, I fancied you must drink too, and that made an association between you and my poor Paul. And then you were so like him about your meals. You so much preferred to eat with me here in this dirty little back-shop, than to go to the best restaurant in the town, just like him. And just like him too, you were so pleased with my cooking. You said



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you had never seen such a cook, that I succeeded in everything, and that was just what Paul used to say."

When I heard this, although it amused me to think how far from the truth my best efforts at solving the problem would have led me, I was not very much surprised. The widow, who was very fond of her husband, looks on all men after his death with eyes still full of his image, and may be attracted either by a physical or by any other resemblance which reminds her of the one she has lost.

I did not know it then—alas! I know it now—this period of my life was to be the last where I was to know peace. I tarry over it without reluctance.

On the morning after my first night in the room "in which Paul died," having finished my accustomed task at my writing-table, I felt that some physical exertion would be beneficial to me. I did not care to go out for a walk, for the sea-air affected me badly, and I determined accordingly to make myself useful in the house. A latent sense of humour, till then choked under the formality of my professional life, was appealed to by the



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prospect of such activity. For the rest, as the terror of paralysis still haunted me, I thought it would be as well to get all the work possible out of my right arm before it became helpless. So when I had come down into the shop, affecting briskness, I said to Julie: "I want something to do. Something which will use my arms."

She hesitated with characteristic prudence. Was I offering services for which I should desire remuneration? Was I going to try and work off my board-bill? Such were the questions which no doubt passed through her mind.

I noticed her hesitation. "I want hard work to do," I said. "I want to convince myself that my arm is not paralysed. I want to bestir myself."

"Oh!" she cried, "that's it? Well, you can saw that block of wood in two. I want the two pieces to stand my filter on."

I set to work with the saw, and, though it tired me greatly, I accomplished the task. But the work was too heavy for me.

"What I should prefer," I said, "is some light genteel employment. Like this," I added, taking the handle of the large coffee-mill out of her hands and commencing to turn it. "I can consider



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myself Robinson Crusoe when he was a slave to the Arabs."

People who came into the shop stared to see me grinding coffee, but I paid no attention to their laughter, for I was delighted to find myself useful once more. And when the rag-merchant came wailing down the street his—"Have you any rags to sell up there, mesdames?" I no longer felt that all that I was good for was to be flung, a human rag, on to a rag-picker's rubbish-heap, useless, inert, a sweeping to be got rid of. And when the coffee was ground, I took a broom and swept out the shop, and then scattered sawdust on the floor. Then, as evening was coming on, I helped Julie to carry in the goods that were displayed outside the front of the shop, and affected almost burlesque briskness, for was I not acting the good apprentice? And later on "Julie Bron's Englishman" was seen to put up the shutters of the little shop.

"It's cut and dried," said the neighbours, as was afterwards reported to us, "*Ca y est*. She's teaching him the business in view of the future."

This manual labour had been such a relief to my mind, that the next day I asked to be allowed to make myself useful again. After some fresh



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hesitation, the widow invited me to assist her in the bottling department, and the particular work on which we were engaged that day was in the preparation of what she called "Imitation Rum." A quart bottle was filled with about a pint of rum from a barrel of the genuine liquor, and to this was added a pint of common spirit, coloured with a burnt sugar fluid. "There's no dishonesty about it," explained Julie. "I have to season it for people who want penny glasses of rum or quarts at half-a-crown." I must say that I took a real and malicious delight in the adulteration, although I could not quite understand why. Perhaps it was the humour of the situation which caused my enjoyment. Whatever was the cause, I threw myself into these adulterating practices with a renegade's furore, and several times Julie had to bid me add a little more of the genuine spirit to the quantity which I passed over in the bottles for the seasoning purposes. As to her conduct in the matter, I was satisfied by the figures that she quoted to me that the only rum which could be supplied at half-a-crown a quart was rum so reduced, and as to adulteration in general, I enunciated the proposition—



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"It's not a bit more sneakish on the part of a grocer to sell adulterated wares than it is for me, or any other writer, to foist off on the public, work which I have scamped, work which isn't my genuine article."

After the bottling came the corking and sealing. I caught the knack of this last operation at once, and in labelling the bottles with the white labels, which bore in gilt letters the words, "Old Rum, Very Superior Quality," I also distinguished myself. The labels which I pasted on the bottles showed not a single crease, and reached the exact height that the grocery protocole exacts. I next cleared a shelf in the shop and myself arranged the forty bottles on it.

"We'll call that the French Academy," I said, but Julie did not laugh, for she had never heard of the Academy or of the forty immortals whose *esprit* was more than half diluted.

Whilst I was arranging the bottles on the shelf, a very small boy came into the shop and asked in a shrill voice for a ha'porth of "dum-dum bullets." I looked into the back-shop, and found that Julie had gone upstairs. So I determined to serve the boy myself.



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"What was it that monsieur asked for?" I said gravely, making a bow.

"A ha'porth of dum-dum," said the little boy.

"I am very much afraid, sir," I said, "that what with the Geneva Convention on the one hand and the Conference at the Hague on the other——"

"It's them brown ones," said the boy, pointing to one of the sweet-jars. "You get one of those tin measures full for a halfpenny."

"Oh, I see!" I said, filling a little bag with the sweets. "Now then, where's the money?" I added, scowling suspiciously, and holding on fast to the paper parcel.

The boy, who was very small and very ragged, held out a battered *sou*. I took it, and together with the parcel, handed him, after pretending to rummage in the cash-drawer, a penny piece.

"It's our new system," I said, "The Cash Return System, which only our enormous profits on the dum-dum confectionery allow us to carry out. Kindly mention the fact to your friends and acquaintances, and continue to favour us with your kind patronage."

The next customer was a coal-heaver, who

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wanted a ha'porth of pickles, and I was much embarrassed how to wrap up the "plenty of vinegar," which he stipulated for, in a small piece of brown paper. Fortunately, just as the coal-heaver was beginning to get impatient and to use bad language, Julie returned.

From that day forward, I devoted all my spare time to the work in the shop. This novel occupation was not only a great relief to my mind, but it amused me also. It was real fun to play at being a grocer, and there was always humour to be extracted out of my customers in conversation. The mother-in-law objected strongly at first to this usurpation of her functions. She said it was very painful to a mother's feelings to see a stranger in her son's place, and when one day Julie laughingly suggested that I should don one of Paul's professional over-all blouses, she declared that she would not allow such a "sacrilege." The fact was she had often asked for the blouses herself for cutting up and lining purposes. Being, however, a very lazy old soul, she was really suited by my activity. It saved her the little work she had been in the habit of doing, and allowed of her sitting in placid beatitude behind the cash-desk, where,



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whilst abusing St. Malo, its climate, its people, and its customs, she could let her fingers stray now into a jar of sugar-almonds, now into a box of chocolate-creams. At the same time she had the satisfaction of feeling that she was keeping me, the usurper, away from the desk and the cash-drawer. Any peculating that was to be done, she considered herself fully able to perform. Primed by the gossips of the Grande Rue, at the instigation of the old lady, some of the customers openly objected to being served by me, on the ground that they were accustomed to Madame Bron, who knew their special tastes. The motive, of course, was to slight me. On the other hand, the children clamoured for the "big monsieur," and refused to be served by anybody else. For though the Cash Return System only worked intermittently, I always gave good measure, whilst the old lady invariably, so the children confided to me, annexed a lollipop or two in screwing up the twist of paper.

In respect of the little tricks of the trade, however, I felt that I should never make a good grocer, and so Julie used to tell me. For instance, I would not practise what she called "bringing



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down the scales with a flop." You banged the stuff into the scale, and the force of the impact sent it down, and you shovelled it out before the balance had recovered. I also felt scruples about serving adulterated goods. One day a woman asked me for vinegar at threepence the quart, and I said—

"From what I am led to believe, there is no vinegar sold in this establishment under fourpence the quart. We are determined to uphold our standard of——"

"Yes, yes, there is," cried Julie, snatching the woman's bottle from her hand. "The threepenny vinegar is kept in the back-shop, as you ought to know by this time."

"It's quite simple," she explained, after the woman had gone. "You take the bottle into the back and fill it with a tenth of *aqua simplex* from the tap. Then you fill up with the fourpenny vinegar."

It was simple enough, but I could never bring myself to do it. "Perhaps," I said to myself, "if I had personal profit out of these little artifices, I should not be so squeamish." For great mistrust of myself was always one of my characteristics. I



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was sorry to find that I took a particular delight in serving spirits. The stuff sold as brandy was in demand all day long, and was mainly bought by the pennyworth. It was mostly fetched by very little children, and there was one little girl who used to come in, on an average, a dozen times a day with her little bottle. This bottle was supposed to contain the fifth of a pint, the price of which was a penny-halfpenny.

"You must be careful always to measure the spirits," explained Julie, "for the customers are up to all sorts of tricks. They'll bring a bottle one day which holds such or such a quantity, but afterwards they bring a similar bottle which holds a good drop more, and trust to my not measuring the stuff, when they ask me to fill it."

I wondered why I took pleasure in serving spirits, knowing, as I did, the harm that such poisoning stuff must do. Was it because having innocently come to great trouble through brandy, I was pleased to see other people coming to grief in the same way? It seemed very human, and insomuch very contemptible. As a matter of fact, it was no doubt because this work was quick, easy, and clean. But I felt contemptible, and

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once or twice tried to ease my conscience by giving a word of advice as I served the cognac. This was invariably received with derision.

One evening, after supper, I had to go through an unpleasant experience. Yet the humiliation which was put upon me seemed to gratify a curious longing for suffering that haunted me. A number of sailors of the crew of an English collier which had arrived in port, invaded the shop at a time when I was quite alone. Julie had gone out, and the errand-boy was truanting. These men were friends of Madame Bron's, and never came to St. Malo without visiting her. They entered the back-shop and seated themselves round the table, and it fell to me to wait upon them. A negro fireman, magnificently arrayed, was, it appeared, standing treat, and it was from him that I took the orders.

"Look sharp, young fellow," said the negro. "Chairs for the gentlemen who haven't got any, glasses and the brandy-bottle."

At first the thing amused me. There is an actor in every man, and with a napkin under my arm, fetching and carrying and filling glasses, I enjoyed myself. The more the negro hectorcd



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me—and what man of colour, when gorgeously arrayed, ever yet missed a chance of asserting his authority?—the better fun it seemed. Drinks were paid for each time the glasses were filled, a penny the glass was the price, and a penny was as often bestowed in a lordly manner on the waiter. I took it with a deep bow, and an affected renewal of briskness. “I wonder,” I thought, “What Mr. Justice Kekewich would say if he could see me now.” After a time, however, the revelry became too boisterous for my nerves. Most of the men had got drunk; the negro shouted bawdy songs, and a Polish ship’s cook picked a quarrel with the engineer’s steward. And again and again I had to fill the glasses. I began to realise, a thing I had never known before, what drunkenness was in fact. The unventilated room reeked with tobacco-smoke and the pungent fumes of corn-spirit. The songs set my head aching violently, and more than once I felt inclined to throw down my napkin and rush away. However, just as I had decided that I could bear it no longer, Julie returned. She was very pleased at first to see the men, “my Englishmen,” as she called them, but when she saw that they were all



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drunk, she took prompt and decisive measures. The brandy-bottle was snatched from the negro's hand, and "Off with you, Plenty Sleep!" she cried in English. And though they clamoured for "just one final," and reminded her that she was dearly beloved by them, one and all, she would listen to no blandishments. "You plenty drink," she said, "now you plenty promenade back; go sleep aboard the boat." And I was surprised to see that this little woman with her energetic manner and broken English got prompter obedience out of the crew of drunken men than the most skilled public-house official.

"She's chucking us out, Bill," said the negro. "And I knows her. We had better be going."

The ship's cook declared that he was too drunk to carry on board the ship a net full of vegetables which he had brought with him, and so left them in my care, requesting me to bring them on board next morning; "where," he said, "there'll be a copper or two for you, my lad."

After they had gone, I helped her to put up the shutters, but when this was finished, I felt faint and had to sit down in the back-shop. Julie was much perturbed, and as usual busied herself



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actively on my behalf. She made me some herb-tea, a speciality of her mother's, a sovereign remedy for nervous disorders. She was so solicitous and energetic, that I was greatly touched in my depressed and woeful state of mind, and when she placed the cup before me and patted my hand soothingly, I felt so affectionate and grateful that I raised her hand to my lips and kissed it. In return for this caress she squeezed my head against her ample bosom, with such ardour that I regretted my advance, and gently disengaged myself.

"Don't misunderstand me," she said. "I am very much attached to you, but I shall never yield to you. The most prominent tradesmen in this town have courted me in vain."

There was so little call for this declaration, that I began to feel alarmed. So I bade her a hasty "good-night" and hurried up to my room, where I barricaded the door with a couple of chairs.

"How dreadful," I said to myself, with the irreducible vanity of the male, "if this friendship were to develop into an amatory business. How could I stay here in such a case, and where am I to go if I have to leave? Am I never to know peace?"




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CHAPTER XIII.

I THOUGHT, in lowering myself, to derive amusement from the contrast between what I was and what I was doing. I know that my evil Fate had long since decreed my *déchéance* from the rank in life to which I belonged, and that what I took for harmless sport was, in fact, an apprenticeship for the days to come.

In the meanwhile, I had no desire to mix once more amongst people of my own class. I was quite happy in the little grocery, playing at petty tradesman in the interval of literary work which occupied my thoughts with a brilliant and fashionable crowd of eighteenth century aristocrats. My imaginary world—the world in which I moved in the mornings when I was translating those Memoirs—was as strange and alien to me as were the real surroundings and frequentations of my afternoons, and the curious reflection often forced itself upon me that had I belonged in fact to either of these worlds my chances of happiness in life



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would have been far greater. It was my misfortune to have been born with middle-class, Calvinistic prejudices. As a gentleman under Louis XV., my wife's misconduct with a man so distinguished in the Army, would have been hailed by me as a guarantee of certain and profitable advancement. Not only should I have benefited by her fortune, but I should have laid under tribute also all the ladies whom I was able favourably to impress. As a man of the working-class in St. Malo of the present day, I should have been equally free from scruple and prejudice. But it may be said of the much-derided British middle-class, and to its credit, that it rarely furnishes the *leno avarus*. I except the gentlemen who, suing in the Divorce Court, demand from the jury the solatium of heavy damages against the co-respondents. Their morality always seemed to me on a level with that of the complacent husbands of the French nobility, and I have often wondered what use they might make of the money thus obtained, under what heading they might carry it to their credit in their ledgers.

I have said that I never felt any wish to mingle once more with people of my own class. Had I



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ever felt such a desire there was at hand a means to gratify it immediately. In the summer months, St. Malo, Dinard, and Paramé are filled with English people, and I had but to stroll round to the Casino, distance from the grocery about five minutes' walk, to be amongst an elegant and fashionable gathering of my countryfolk.

It was Julie who obliged me to visit the Casino on the occasion of which I am about to speak. She insisted on my doing so. "You want a little amusement," she said. "It will do you good to hear some good music and to see people other than the loafers of the Grande Porte." She had come to have so much influence over me that, though I dreaded the possible excitement of such a change, I did as she had suggested. I dressed again like a gentleman. Julie was so impressed by my appearance that she insisted on accompanying me as far as the town-gate. I think she was pleased and proud that the neighbours should see me thus magnificently arrayed. For I passed among them, as I had heard, for a needy adventurer who was living on the bounty of the widow whom I had inspired with an unholy passion, for a *leno avarus*, in short.



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A gay Parisian farce, "*Les Surprises du Divorce*," was on the bill at the Casino Theatre, and through the thick hide of my prejudices I could feel regret pricking me that I too could not conjure up such easy tolerance nor contemplate, otherwise than as the most sombre of tragedies, vicissitudes which sent the public shrieking with laughter.

During the first *entr'acte* the audience flocked into the room where gambling was in progress, and closed round the race-game tables. It was curious to note how entirely the expressions of all these people changed. Their smiling *insouciance* had given way to looks of strained anxiety. Here was the serious thing of life. There was no food for laughter here. The grinning mouths became closed and set, the expanding eyes contracted, and on the foreheads a characteristic wrinkle showed itself. For here money was in question, whilst there it had been but the bagatelle of passion. The women seemed most eager of all. It was not a pleasant sight, and I soon turned away, and passing out through the café, made for the terrace which overlooks the sea. A band was playing here, and it was very pleasant to sit in



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the cool air and listen to the music whilst one's eyes regaled themselves on the wonderful spectacle of the black waters under the starlight. Well dressed, a cup of delicious black coffee before me, and a cigarette between my lips, I felt almost happy. Indeed my contentment was such that I decided not to return to the theatre. The couplings and uncouplings of the waves interested me far more than the *chassez-croisez* of the mimic lovers on the stage. So, when the electric bell sounded to summon us back, I let the others go and stayed behind. I was amused to see how quickly the crowded terrace was emptied. Indeed, one minute after the rattling of the bell had ceased there were left watching the sea but two people, myself and another man. This person was sitting only a few yards off. His back was turned towards me, but from his dress I could see that he was an Englishman. I noticed that he seemed indifferent to the magnificent spectacle before us, for he kept his head turned away from the sea, and seemed to be contemplating the brick wall at the end of the verandah. Rather silly affectation of indifference, I thought. Presently he rapped on



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the table with his stick. A waiter hurried up, and an animated dialogue ensued. I was rising to leave, when the waiter ran up to me and said: "Monsieur is English, I believe. Would Monsieur be so kind as to tell me what this gentleman wants? He speaks no French, and I cannot understand what he says." Then, as though to enlist my sympathies on behalf of my countryman, he added: "This poor Monsieur is blind." I started forward. Three impetuous strides brought me to the stranger's side, and I found myself standing before the man who had wrecked my life. His poor, sightless face was turned up towards mine, and in spite of the great agitation which set me trembling, my heart welled over with pity at the sight before me. An intense melancholy sat on his ravaged face. He had changed terribly since I had seen him in the flush of triumph.

"*Monsieur que voici*," said the waiter, touching his arm, "he spik the English very nice."

Then I heard his voice for the first time. "It's a confounded nuisance," he said, with an affectation of *insouciance*. "I can't make out what has become of my man. As you see, I am

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blind and have to be led about like a child. I sent my man over half-an-hour ago into the town to get me the papers. He ought to have got back in ten minutes, and I begin to think he must have lost his way. He doesn't speak a word of French, like myself. Has anything been seen of my man?"

He then gave me a description of his valet, which I translated to the waiter, who ran off to make inquiries.

"It's a downright nuisance," he continued. "I promised Lord Z. to be back on the yacht by ten. . . . There's a supper-party, and it's past ten now."

Just then the waiter returned. Nothing had been seen of the person for whom the gentleman was asking.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried the blind man. "What is to become of me? Am I to sit here all night? My good friend," he asked, putting out a groping hand, "would you help a countryman in distress, and take me in a cab down to the quay, where a boat from the yacht will be waiting for me?"

"Certainly," I said. "Will you take my arm?"



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He rose with alacrity, and we were stepping out when the waiter interposed. "Stop a bit," he said, "there is monsieur's whisky-and-soda to be paid for."

"What does he say," asked the officer.

"He says that you owe him something."

"By Jove," he cried, with a laugh, "I had forgotten about that! And the best of it is," he added, "I haven't a penny on me. My man carries my purse, for I cannot distinguish one coin from another. I am afraid I shall have to ask you to carry your kindness a step farther and to pay for my drinks. It's lucky you were at hand."

I paid the waiter, and then, gently guiding his faltering footsteps, led the betrayer through the Casino gardens, out into the street.

"I am afraid there is no cab to be had," I said, after I had looked round. "But it is only a short walk to the landing-stage, and I am quite ready to accompany you so far."

"You are very kind," he said, "to a perfect stranger."

"Oh, you are no stranger to me," I said.

He gave a faint smile.

"Yes," he said, "the Dutchmen put their mark



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on me. I am easily recognised. You have seen my picture, I suppose."

His words brought back to me the remembrance of a certain morning when the sight of his picture had aroused within me a mad fury which had well-nigh driven me to cruel murder, and with the remembrance a renewal of the angry passion. I turned on him, but at the sight of his poor face which he had raised inquiringly, for my brusque movement had no doubt surprised him, my anger turned to regretful shame.

"Every Englishman," I said, "has seen your picture. It hangs in every home. It is engraved on every heart."

"You are very kind," he said. Then he sighed, and added, "If only I had led a better life, I could almost feel happy now. But in the awful solitude of my eternal night spectres haunt me. What does the veneration of a whole people avail a man who has no respect for himself. You must find me a dismal companion," he continued, "but constant melancholy is one of the appanages of blindness. I would give all this fame, these titles, decorations, money, and the rest only to be able once again to look upon a woman's face."



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"Ah-h!" I cried, pulling up.

"Yes, my mother's," said the blind soldier. "Just to see her look of pride at what they say I did so well."

We had now reached the landing-stage, and as my companion had expected, the boat from Lord Z's yacht was in waiting. Here also we found the missing valet, who, having lost his way in the town, had returned to the quay.

I handed the blind man over to his care and bade him farewell.

He held out his hand. "You have not told me your name," he said. "Whom have I to thank for such kindness to a stranger?"

I hesitated. Then I pressed his hand. As to telling him my name, I am glad to say that I did not hesitate. I gave him the first best British patronymic that passed through my head, and added, "Any Englishman would have been pleased and proud to do what I have done, to pass a few minutes in the company of the hero of so many fights."

A faint smile again illumined his wan face. He pressed my hand warmly and turned away with a "Good night, good night; God bless you."

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I stood watching the little boat till it disappeared in the night. Then heaving a mighty sigh, I turned back towards my squalid, miserable, and lonely bed.

Julie was waiting up for me, and greeted me with laughter.

"Just fancy," she cried, "how foolish the people are. When they saw us walking out together just now, they said that we were going to see about putting up the banns. Yes, they have quite made up their minds that we are going to be married. That little boy, George, to whom you are always giving sweets, came in just now and said: 'Where's your man?' Man for husband, you know. 'He's not my man,' I said. 'Then, perhaps, he's your father?' There's no doubt people are talking about us."

A feeling of intense irritation took hold of me. For a moment I felt like rushing out and away, anywhere, straight ahead, away from all this. But my sense of fairness mastered me. Why should I make this poor woman responsible for the galling absurdity of my position? It was not her fault that while my rival was supping on a luxurious yacht with a peer of England, I should



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be drinking herb-tea, as a remedy for diseased nerves in a malodorous grocery back-shop. Could she have provided it, I should be feasting in luxury equal to his.

To change the conversation, I began to tell her the plot of the play that had been given at the Casino that night. After listening to the first few words, however, her attention wandered, and her eyes became fixed and stony. So I stopped speaking, and then she burst out with the remark, "My pickles are my great success. It's wonderful how everybody runs after my pickles."

That night I had to drench myself with bromide before I could get to sleep.

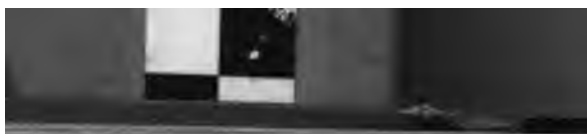
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CHAPTER XIV.

BY the mid-day's post next day I received a letter and a newspaper from England, both forwarded through the publishers for whom I was acting as drudge at a halfpenny a line.

The letter was from my wife :

"Dearest," she wrote, "although I don't know when and where this will reach you, if it ever does, I cannot help writing to you. It seems less lonely to me when I write. Dearest, I am writing from our old house in Norwood. It is *ours* now, for one of the first investments I made after I received my money from the solicitors was to buy it. We were so happy in that house. I have furnished it much as it was in the old days, only better. Your study, which awaits you, looks delightful. I have got back *all* your books, except those stupid, dull Law Reports. New carpets everywhere, and new curtains in the dining and drawing rooms. The garden is



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looking lovely. And all this is our own. No rent to pay. The papers were signed yesterday. I have had my money now nearly a month. It is so invested that after paying for the house, I have an income of nine hundred a year. Now, come back to me. Come *back home*. I put your candle out every night in the hall, next to mine. When will you come back? Mind, as I told you in my last, if you do not come to me, I shall come to you. I do not think that I should have much difficulty in finding out where you are, and, having found you, I should bring you back *home*, by *force*. I really want you so badly. I think that you are very lonely. I know that you are very poor, and I fear that you are ill. I met our doctor the other day and he asked after you, very kindly, but he frightened me about you, for he said that with your affection of the heart you needed the greatest care. It has not been troubling you of late has it, dear? Do put an end to my anxiety and come. You shall take chambers in the Temple again, and when people see that you are flourishing and want nothing of anybody, they will soon bring you business. In a year from now you might not only have got back



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your old place at the Bar, but have got ahead of all those false friends who turned on you when you broke down. In another year you might be earning a bigger income than the one I have got, this wretched income which is keeping you from me. People often ask me where you are, and I say that you are travelling abroad for your health, but everybody suspects something, for they see that I am very unhappy. My eyes are often swollen with crying. Come back and use my money until you have set yourself up again, and then if you like we will give up this fortune and I will once more be dependent on you, as I loved to be. Only then you won't have to turn a mangle. Poor darling, do you remember the twopence-farthing you earned one day at Catford? I have had a bracelet made of the nine farthings, and I wear it always. I am proud of it, because it reminds me of you. It reminds me that when we were poor you were not too proud to do any work to help me. And now you won't let me help you." There was a postscript: "I have put a stone on your poor poet's grave. On it are engraved those lines from the Adonaïs which he used to quote, beginning: 'He hath outsoared the shadow



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of our night.' When will you come with me to see it and to put flowers on the grave? What would the poor boy say if he could see that we are separated now? He did not think me a bad woman."

I shook my head as I laid the letter aside. "She does not know," I said, "that easy as is the descent——" If I had had the slightest hope that in time I could win back my old position, I think that I would have started for home that minute. I did so want to be back with her. But I knew that I should never be able to speak in public again. My nerves were gone. I could only hope to be able to earn by obscure literary work such a living as my present. I should be at her charge from the first, and little by little I should accustom myself to the ignominy of my position. No! No! No! It could not be.

The paper was a local Norwood newspaper. As I opened it indifferently I fancied that my wife had sent it to me to read the announcement of her purchase. I glanced eagerly to see her dear name in print. Then my eye was caught by a blue mark running down the side of a short



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paragraph. It was to the effect that the "other man" was expected to take up his residence at Norwood after his return from a yachting cruise, so as to be in proximity to the Normal College for the Blind, that admirable institution. "The gallant soldier," so ran the concluding lines, "wishes to follow certain courses of instruction. As our readers are aware, the blind are so trained at this college, in reading, writing, games, and even cycling, that their terrible infirmity is reduced to a minimum."

I turned to the wrapper. Who had sent me this paper, with no other purpose than to wound me? A glance at the writing of the original address sufficed to enable me to answer that question. The writing was the same as that of the fatal letter which had broken my life. I felt again the pang of jealousy. She would surely meet him. The sight of his misery would touch her kind heart. Had it not touched even mine? She would not find it in her to repel his certain advances. Pity and mutual condolence, to what might they not lead? Pity is the worst procuress.

I strode up to the time-table of the Southampton



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boats, but before I had consulted it my mind was changed. What right had I who had deserted her to wish to interfere with my wife's future conduct? She must even live her own life. She was vassal to me no longer. And I had no right at all to suppose that she would do evil. She had shown the sincerest repentance for the fault. She had seen its disastrous and irrevocable results. But I sighed very deeply as I turned back into the gloomy little shop which was my home. Comfort suggested itself to me, but it was of a nature such that, world-weary and heavy-laden as I was, I quailed at the thought of it. It was this: If my strange physical state betokened that my days were drawing to a close—a thought that had often come to me—and that consequently in a few months, a year or two, perhaps, I should be no more, would it not be a very good thing that these two should have met again, have revived their ancient amity? For when a logical and implacable fate had removed me from the ache of this world and my cumbersome person was no more, the only obstacle would be gone which stood between their present guilt and the possibility of atonement. He, not I any longer,



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was the mate she had elected. Whilst I lived she walked enshrouded in shame, he with a phantom troubling his eternal night. They would be very happy together. In her company he would forget his blindness. And she—what joy she would take in hourly self-sacrifice! Still I did not like the thought of death, and I bitterly revolted against the thought that she would go to other arms.

A circumstance now came to divert into another channel my gloomy speculations. It had seemed to me for some minutes previously that there was a sound of crying which proceeded from the back, and as I never could remain indifferent to the sorrows of others, I hastened in that direction. I had not been mistaken. Julie Bron, with her apron to her eyes, and rocking to and fro in grief, was in tears. It took me some time to get her to tell me what was troubling her. It was a squalid and miserable story. She was heavily in debt. Her principal creditor was a wine merchant at Havre, who held drafts of hers to the amount of forty pounds. The traveller for this firm was a man called Noelle.

It appeared that my presence in the shop, the gossip of the malicious neighbours, prompted by



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the mother-in-law, had aroused his senile jealousy. Although he had promised her every facility of payment and certain renewal of her drafts, he had now determined to punish her for her coldness towards him and her preference of a disreputable English adventurer by insisting on the fulfilment of her contract.

“He came rushing into the shop just now and cried out: ‘I proposed no arrangement at all. I always understood that the drafts which were presented to you this morning would be taken up. We are not disposed to wait any longer. Now if by the 5th of next month, the 5th in the morning, mind you, the whole of your debt isn’t paid I shall put you into the bankruptcy court. And to guarantee the firm I shall put in a provisional seizure the same day. Ah, you play the prude with me, and you keep a man on the premises sleeping in the room next to yours! That is your business, of course; but when I see you regaling that man with money which belongs to our firm and making him jolly on wine which comes out of our cellars, I cry “*Halte-là!*” Ah! you think you can play with Papa Noelle? You will find out your mistake.’ I told him that he had

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promised me a renewal, that I had had a very bad season and could not pay him, and that he must do as he liked. Then he began to stamp about the shop, shouting at the top of his voice, and threatening proceedings for fraudulent bankruptcy, to put me in prison, and so on. I told him that he mustn't imagine that he could frighten me with his loud voice and his rough manner, that bigger men, much bigger men than he, had tried it and failed. Then he changed his tone, and put the bargain before me: 'I don't want to bully you, Julie,' he said. 'Why won't you be nice with me? You'll find me very reasonable. You know that I like you very much. Why won't you be nice with me?' I answered him as he deserved to be answered, and then he grew outrageous again. It appears he has been told that I give you fifteen francs a day for pocket-money, and that besides that you help yourself from the till when you want to go and gamble at the Casino! 'Do you suppose,' he cried, 'that we are going to keep fancy men for our women customers?' "

"He said that, did he?" I cried. "Can you tell me where I can find this Monsieur Noelle?"



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"Oh, treat him with the contempt that he deserves! It is only his jealousy of you. But," and here she burst out crying again, "it all means that I shall be sold up, that I shall lose my business, that I am ruined. It's very hard after having worked here as I have worked."

I tried to console her.

"Can you advance me forty-five pounds?" she said, coming to practical matters at once.

"I don't know," I replied. "I will do my best. I will write at once to London."

She did not seem very much inspired by this promise, and, in the course of her lamentations, broke out with the only unjust thing that I had ever heard her say: "What a pity it is that you ever came here!"

I made no remark, but went upstairs to my room and wrote a long letter to my publisher, begging him to remit me at once what was due to me for the lines of copy which I had sent him, and to add as an advance on the work that was to follow what would make the sum up to forty-five pounds.

I had very little hope that he would accede to my request, for he was neither a liberal

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nor an obliging man; but I could leave nothing undone which might help the poor woman who had been good to me.

Whilst I was writing this letter I could hear her talking in the shop below. Her mother-in-law was drawing from what had happened its implacable moral. Disorder, she pointed out, leads to loss of public confidence. Here her voice became indistinct, and I presumed that she had helped herself from a box of finest Algerian dates, a fruit of which she was very fond.

When her voice became clear again, I heard her say: "Send this Englishman packing, and you may be sure that Noelle will not be hard upon you. I'll see him about it at once. But I know that it will be useless to ask him for any concession unless I can tell him that you are firmly resolved to lead a better life in the future."

"Better life!" cried Julie. "I like that. That brute Noelle desires nothing better than my dishonour—for his benefit, *bien entendu*. As to the Englishman, you know as well as I do that he is an honourable man, who has always paid me regularly, indeed in advance, and who has never once been wanting in respect towards me. On the



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contrary, his frigid manners have sometimes irritated me, for I am very fond of him."

"Ha, ha!" cried the old woman. "There we are. You are fond of him?"

"Very! I like him as well as my husband. Better, perhaps, if in a different way."

"No mother would stand by and listen to such outrageous talk where her dead son is concerned. Get yourself out of the mess as best you can. But when you have been sold up and are turned out of your house, don't either you or your Englishman come to me for a bit of bread. I have not more than I can do with." Then, changing her tone, she said: "Now about the goods in this shop. If Noelle does put in an execution, and you say that you have no means of avoiding that at least, all these good things will be lost. Now, why shouldn't you let me carry things home? Before the fifth I could remove quite a nice assortment in my little black basket, just coming and going. All that rum, for instance, and the coffee and——"

"No, certainly not," cried Julie. "Nothing goes out of this shop. I am not a thief."

Some angry discussion followed. I did not



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listen to it. I was thinking over my plans for the future. It seemed impossible for me to remain on here any longer. My presence caused evident prejudice to my kind hostess. But there was a graver consideration. I had heard the confession of what I had long imagined. She had grown fond of me. Pity here again had been the intermediary. It was necessary for her sake that I should disappear. Her native honour must not, on my account, suffer even the stain of an evil thought. For the rest my position would be a ridiculous one. A middle-aged man courted, in vain, by a middle-aged woman. What had I done that Fate should make such sport of me? Where what occurred was not tragic to tears, it forced me to figure, in spite of my instinctive sense of dignity, as a pitiable buffoon. I must go. But whither? Was I never to know peace? Were my remaining days to be spent in wandering from place to place, finding rest nowhere?

After long consideration, I determined that as soon as an answer had come from my publisher, I would take my departure. If he sent the money I would get up a pleasant surprise for my good



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friend. She should receive Noelle's bill receipted on the morning on which she expected to see him arrive with all the terrors of the civil law. If there was no money for this? I would leave her the blessing of a poor man to whom she had been kind in his adversity. I decided to go to Paris, where, as I knew, a man can live very cheaply and where I should be in reach of the inestimable treasures of the National Library. The friendship of books was the only thing left to me in this world.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE days that followed were sorrowful and the nights full of lamentation. From my bed, through the partition, I could hear Julie bemoaning her destiny. During the daytime she was usually to be found in the back-shop, with her apron to her eyes. The mother-in-law took advantage of the position and tithed as she never had tithed before.

It alarmed me to hear that it was on me that the widow had pinned her last hope. The letter that was to come from London would decide her fate. I tried to make her understand how faint was the chance that my application would be successful. She said it could not be otherwise, that she had consulted the cards and that they had told her that help would come to her through a tall, fair man, who was connected with the law.

The letter arrived on the third of the month, just two days before the time of grace accorded by the vindictive Noelle was to expire. The



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position was exactly the same. Julie had not been able to raise a single penny towards the debt, and forty-four pounds were needed to prevent her total ruin.

The letter contained a cheque. My eye went at once to the left-hand corner and my heart sank. The cheque was for fifteen pounds seventeen and sixpence halfpenny. I went to the top of the stairs and called out, "Bad news!" She gave a big sigh, but said nothing. I returned into my room and began to read the letter. The rules of the firm, it appeared, were entirely opposed to any such arrangement as I had proposed. The matter had been fully gone into, with the result that, to their regret, they were not even able to meet me half way. The cheque enclosed represented my "lineage" for 7,621 lines of copy at a halfpenny a line. Further remittances would be made as copy came in. I ground my teeth, less from the feeling of my humiliation and impotence than from vexation that I should not be able to help the woman whom I heard sobbing in the room below me. As I read on, however, another feeling came to trouble me.

"Can you not make it convenient," continued



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the writer, "to have your letters addressed direct to you? We find it troublesome dealing with mail matter for our authors. It will also be advisable that you should give your address to your friends. We cannot undertake to keep other people's secrets. To-day a lady called during the dinner hour, when there was nobody in the shop except the office-boy, and asked where you were to be found. The lad did not know that you had requested us not to give your address to anybody, and as the lady satisfied him that she was your wife he gave her the required information. She was apparently very pleased, for she presented him with half-a-sovereign, and from what she said in her excitement it is probable that within twenty-four hours of your receiving this letter you will meet her in St. Malo. We regret the occurrence, for you asked so particularly that your address should not be given, but in future we hope to be spared from——" I read no further. My wife was coming to St. Malo, no doubt to take me home. I knew that if I saw her, I should yield even before she had opened her lips in entreaty. I should be helpless in her little hands. It could not be—it should not be. I never



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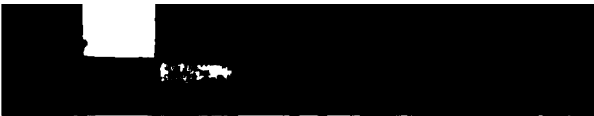
wavered, though very sick with longing. I must go. She should not find me if she came. It pained me also to think of abandoning the poor woman downstairs in the moment of her worst trouble, and I could anticipate what would be said about my conduct. Old Madame Bron would surely talk of the rats that leave the sinking ships, and even Julie would find that I had not acted well. For I felt that I must leave in secret, if for no other reason than to prevent my wife from obtaining any clue as to where I had gone. Then it suddenly occurred to me—and the thought brought some relief—that it was still in my power to help my friend downstairs. But the first thing that had to be done was to get the money for my cheque. I took my hat and hurried out into the town. After I had cashed it at a banker's where I had done business before and where I was known, I determined to write the letter which I intended to leave for my wife. I was just then outside the little café where I had taken my first meal in St. Malo, and forgetting the kind of company I was likely to meet within, I decided to write my letter there. The fat hostess was drinking brandy from a tumbler as I entered, and



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in one corner I saw a slovenly, fair-haired girl who was sitting with one arm thrown round a sailor's neck. Whilst I was writing my letter, I overheard whispered remarks which concerned me, and in the end the landlady asked me: "Aren't you the Englishman who is going to marry the widow in the grocery in the Grande Rue?" Both Marie-la-Blonde and the sailor burst into a loud laugh, and the girl said something to the effect that when she took a "fancy man" he wouldn't be English in the first place. It interested me to find with what total indifference I listened to these insults.

"Dearest," I wrote, "I have heard that you have found where I am living, and that you are coming to say to me by word of mouth what you have written to me. I cannot stay to meet you, for I feel that at your first word, nay, even before you open your lips, I should give in. And it *must not be*. I cannot tell you with what grief I say this, but as you know how I love you, you will understand what it means to me to go away from you again. I can write no more. By the time you read this I shall be far away, and each



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hour will take me further away from all that I hold dear in this life. If you write to me, address your letters to the post-office in Paris. They will be forwarded thence to my address. I will not leave you without news of myself, and I still hope that the day may come when we may be re-united. It is my dearest hope. Another thing, dear. The woman, my landlady, whom you will see when you come to the house where I have been living, has been very good to me. I do not think that I exaggerate in saying that by her care of me during the first weeks of my life here, when my heart seemed like to break, she saved your husband's life. She is in sore distress for the want of a little money. I tried to help her, but was unable to do so.

"She is thoroughly honest, and if you lend her the money which will save her from ruin, she will pay you back. I think that a sum of fifty pounds will save her from ruin. Do this for my sake. God bless you, darling."

I then wrote a note for Julie, and enclosed the letter for my wife in the envelope. I then returned to the Grande Rue.

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Julie seemed to have reconciled herself to the inevitable. She made no reference to the letter I had received that morning, and made haste to excuse herself for having spoken irritably to me on more than one recent occasion. "Don't think," she said, "that I blame you in any way for my misfortunes. I am only anxious as to how I shall make you comfortable after the smash."

I suggested that possibly my business might soon oblige me to leave St. Malo, and I saw her blench. The mother-in-law, who was present, ejaculated a sarcastic "*Parbleu!*" but made no reference to sinking ships.

Julie spoke much of Noelle that day. At one time brandishing the cheese-knife, she said to me: "You see this knife? Well, if I had the choice of having this drawn across my throat, or of getting out of my difficulties with Noelle by being what he calls nice with him, I'd say to the man with the knife, 'Go ahead, my lad!'"

The shop was closed early that night. I helped her as usual to put up the shutters. "It's not the few ha'porths of pickles we shall sell," Julie had remarked, "which will make up the eleven



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hundred francs I need for the day after to-morrow at noon."

When I had paid her a few francs which settled my account, she said with a laugh, "Another thousand and eighty-four francs and we can send Noelle go hang." But the laugh she gave was a hollow one, and long after she had gone to bed I could hear her sighing and groaning behind the partition. At last, however, I could tell that she had fallen asleep. I at once began to make my preparations for departure. There was leaving St. Malo harbour that night at midnight a small boat for Havre. My intention was to travel to Havre and there to take the Transatlantic to New York, and thence make my way to Canada. It was just possible that in that country I might be able to make my way. I had passed as a student at the University of Paris all the examinations in French statute law which would be required to qualify me to practise in Canada. For the rest—need I say it?—my future occupied my thoughts but little. What was essential was that I should put between myself and the temptation, which even at that moment was moving towards me in the most seductive form, the widest distance



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possible. It had indeed occurred to me that once in Canada, I should never have the money to return to Europe, and that consequently an insurmountable barrier would be raised between me and what it was not right for me to do.

I packed my bag as noiselessly as possible, and as I strapped it down I heard the whistle of the Havre boat. Then I walked on tip-toe to the door of Julie's room, opened it and looked in. It was the first time that I had ever taken a glance at what was behind the partition, and an exclamation rose to my lips at what I saw. The closet, for it was little else, was filled with lumber. A camp bedstead stood in one corner. On this, partially dressed, Julie was lying covered with an old sack. It was indeed a woeful bedchamber, for which, on my account, she had given up the room and the warm, comfortable bed where for so many weeks I had luxuriated.

Julie was lying on her side with her face turned towards me, and on it was the pitiful expression of a child that has cried itself to sleep. One rough, red hand hung out from under the sacking. I stepped forward and knelt down, and gently raised the hand to my lips and kissed it. Then

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rising up I stole noiselessly out of the room. I placed the letter I had prepared on the table where she would see it on bringing me my breakfast, and then crept down the stairs and out of the house. As I reached the street I heard the whistle of the Havre boat blowing for the second time. I looked at the dark façade of the house which had sheltered me so long. I lingered, hesitation having come to me. The soul dies a little each time that one separates from a friend. It seemed to me that in turning my back upon this house I was leaving peace for ever behind me. But I thought of the morrow and resolution came back to me. I swung round on my heel and hurried off to the docks.

It was not till the little boat, the *St. Brieuc*, was well out to sea that the troubling thought came to me that possibly the evil rumours of the town anent my relations with Julie Bron might reach my wife's ears. Were she to meet the mother-in-law first, the vilest calumny would, I knew, be repeated to her. Had this occurred to me before, it is possible that my course might have been a different one. How dreadful if my wife supposed. . . . That she would not judge




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me harshly, even if she believed the story, I knew full well, but none the less in finding excuse for me might she not also find condonation for herself, and in this condonation a possible palliation for the future. That would be bad indeed, for it is the woman's second fault which brings with it the irrevocable moral ruin. Again, in all this it was only my wife's welfare that occupied my thoughts. I consoled myself, however, with the reflection that my wife knew me too well to believe me guilty, no matter how many lying tongues might try to defame me. For the rest, Julie was there to defend my honour in defending her own.

The voyage to Havre was a beautiful one. The sea was calm and the moon was at her full. I remained on deck all night pumping the fresh air into my lungs, which since I had been confined in the close and malodorous town had long lacked such enjoyment.

We reached Havre at two o'clock in the afternoon, and after landing I drove at once to the office of the Transatlantic Company. A steamer was to sail for New York on the morrow. I took a passage in the steerage, which cost me six



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pounds. As the clerk was making out my ticket he asked me in a casual way if I possessed thirty dollars to produce on landing in New York, and further, whether I had ever been confined in a prison or a lunatic asylum. When I had satisfied him on these points—I noticed by the way that he did not listen to my answers—he handed me my contract paper. On perusing this I found that the steerage passengers were divided into tables, and that each "table" elected a "chief of the plate," who each day designated which of his subordinates should go to the galley and fetch the rations for the rest. In former times I might have looked forward with apprehension to a voyage under such circumstances, but now, as I have said, all things were indifferent to me, and as to actual physical hardship, it was in so far welcome to me that it helped me to forget the moral suffering which at all times tortured me.

I had hoped to be allowed to sleep on the ship and so to save the expense of an hotel, but that it appeared could not be allowed. I therefore took a room in an inn near the docks, and remained in my room all the afternoon. My retirement may have aroused suspicions in the mind of the



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innkeeper. He may have fancied me a fugitive from justice. But the fact was that I had a wild fancy that possibly my wife might have learned that morning where I had gone and follow me to Havre. It was pitiful indeed to have to hide from the being I loved so deeply. For the rest, I was the less disposed for exercise that for some time past I had been suffering from a curious affection of the ankle. It had become swollen, and, though walking was not painful, it was uncomfortable. Apart from this, I may remark, my general health was not too bad. I had a constant pain under my left shoulder, which I attributed to indigestion, and there were always black spots before my eyes, which I set down to biliousness. I was to learn shortly, and without the payment of any fee, what these symptoms, in no wise alarming, portended.

My last night on European soil was a sleepless one. The bitterness of parting allowed me not one minute's rest. I was glad when day dawned and I could make my way to the ship.



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CHAPTER XVI.

ON reaching the quay alongside which the Transatlantic steamer "*La Champagne*" was lying, I was directed by an abrupt official to enter a kind of railed-in enclosure already well-nigh filled with my fellow-passengers of the steerage. We were people from all parts of the world, but Italians predominated. There were Assyrians and Armenians, Turks and Greeks, and some people who wore sheepskins, which had an unpleasant smell. Every language furnished its blasphemies to the volume of sound that rose on the fresh morning air from that enclosure. At one end a passage led out of the railed-in space, along which a queue of steerage passengers was passing slowly through a double row of hurdles into a shed. From this shed the screams of children proceeded. In due course I reached it, and then found that before being allowed to go on board every passenger had to be vaccinated. Having submitted to this operation,



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I had to pass before another doctor, who jerked my hat off my head and gave a scrutinising glance at my forehead. I was glad that he did not turn down my lip with his thumb as he had done to the man who had preceded me. I was then free to climb up the gangway and board the ship. Here a steerage-steward met me, and having inspected me carefully, beckoned me to follow him. "You look like a man who will do the right thing by the service," he said, "and so I'll take you forward, where you will have a better berth than aft." I followed him and he led me to the fore-castle, where we descended three flights of steps down into the very bowels of the ship. I had prepared myself for a sight even more repelling than the one my future quarters presented. The space in this section of the hold was almost entirely taken up with "blocks" of sleeping bunks in double tiers. Between the blocks were narrow passages where during meal times trestle-tables were placed. The ceiling was low and the portholes let in but little light. Through an opening in the far end of this compartment one caught sight of a long and gloomy succession of holds similarly fitted. There



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were, I learned, seven hundred of us, men, women and children, who were to cross the Atlantic down among the rats, not very far from the bilge. Most of the narrow, coffin-like bunks in these catacombs of the living were already bespoken, but after some search I found a vacant place at the corner of one block, on the upper tier. It was favourably situated, for on one side at least was an open space. I placed my bag upon the meagre straw mattress, and then all that remained for me to do was to fee the steward. "It will be worth your while," he had said, not without menace in his tone. I afterwards saw that the poor wretches who could not afford to pay these men the usual toll of four shillings were not only deprived of their rations of food, and, worse torture of all, of drinking water, but were exposed to actual violence. As the steward afterwards confided to me, he was paid so badly by the Company—eight shillings a week was his wage—that he was forced to extort money by any means in his power out of his wretched charges. "We all are on the make," he said, "on this ship, from the captain down to the smallest cabin-boy, but with us stewards in the steerage it is a question of life or death for our

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wives and families. For my part I would like another trade."

I was now free to go on deck and watch the arrivals. The sight was picturesque and yet painful. The emigrants were hurried on board like cattle. Only the Italians were detained at the gangway and carefully rubbed down. This, I was told, was to see that they carried no knives fitted for fighting purposes.

All the time that I was watching the animated scene on the quay the thought troubled me that at any moment I might see my wife appear, and I could already picture to myself the look of horror that would come into her eyes when she saw me amidst my present surroundings. I prayed that the humiliation might be spared me. I did not want her to see how low I had fallen in the world, for women attach to these things an importance which is not due to them, and I feared that her regard for me might be lessened if she saw me herded with all the outcasts of the Old World. For I did not for one moment fear lest her dear eyes might even for one moment cause me to hesitate about carrying out to the end the plan that I had decided upon.



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At eleven o'clock we were driven below, and entering by the fore-castle hatchway, emerged in single file aft, after passing through the whole series of holds affected to the accommodation of the steerage passengers. The sights I saw were painful; the awful promiscuity; the dirt, the many weazened little children; the physical horrors. The object of this tattered procession was that our tickets might be examined, and after it was over we were again driven below for the first meal. I found that having paid the steward the sum which he had demanded of me I should not be expected to perform any of the menial duties which were announced on my contract. I was given a seat at what was called the French table, where ten or twelve of the less verminous and ragged of my fellow-passengers were to mess together. There was not a single real Frenchman amongst them, and in assuming that nationality they had forgotten to acquire those manners of courtesy which popular fancy ascribes to the French nation. Already from the first the fact that I was an Englishman exposed me to ridicule and insult. As I sat down to the narrow board for my first meal, sarcastic questions as to the progress of the

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South African war were addressed to me, and it soon became clear to me that a conspiracy had been formed against me to deprive me of my due share of the unequally divided banquet. The food was served in a large tin bucket, on which my messmates threw themselves voraciously. Those who got hold of it first helped themselves so abundantly that for the last-comers little if anything remained. My companions arranged matters so that I was always the last, and during the whole of that eight days' voyage I lived on little else but bread. I could no doubt have fought for my food like the rest, but in the first place I disdained to do so, and in the second place my physical weakness had so increased since I had left St. Malo, that I do not think that in any struggle with these sturdy and famished louts I should have been able to assert my rights.

Whilst we were feeding from the bucket the ship began to move. I left the table and hurried on deck to see the last of the Old World. Possibly I still had a lingering hope that I might see on the landing place a well-loved form which would send me friendly greetings to cheer me on my voyage. Hundreds of handkerchiefs were



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waving, but none waved for me. I was alone as I left, I was to be alone as I travelled, and alone I was to enter amongst strangers on a new life.

During the course of that afternoon I made a few acquaintances and listened to many life-stories. The joyousness of all these poor people produced a profound impression on me. They had all failed in the Old World, they were penniless and ragged, and yet they moved radiant with hope. All the evils of life were to their thinking behind them, buried under the mist that lay to leeward, and ahead was nothing but bright promise. These hundred hopes around me may have been beneficially contagious—or was it the exhilarating effect of the air and rapid motion?—I began to feel hope myself. After all why should not the new life to which I was hastening have good things in store for me? It was so little that I demanded of fate—just the power to keep a wife in some semblance of comfort. Yet what appeared to me so little was to all those around me the sum of their wildest expectations.

A middle-aged man, who was respectably dressed, had attracted my attention by his extreme exuberance. He was dancing about the deck



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snapping his fingers and twisting his legs in and out in a manner of extreme gracefulness. Now and again he chirped a little song, and even when he was resting his joy bubbled from his face in a succession of happy smiles. I was curious to know why his delight was so great, and I hoped that from what he might tell me of his expectations I too might find cause, if not to dance and snap my fingers, at least to smile and feel happy. For I had begun to feel an appetite for happiness.

"I am going back to my wife," he explained.

"Ah!" I said. "I can understand now why you should feel so happy."

"Yes," he said. "She run away from me seven years ago with a fellow in der shop. I am a pork butcher by trade, and I had a little shop in Breslau, which is my home. After she had gone I took to drinking and all manner of follies, and I come right down in der world, gaol, lock-up, and der rest. About two months ago I got a letter from der New Jerusalem in Ohio. I was just thinking of cutting my throat with der knife what I used to use for der pigs. It was from mine wife. Dat fellow was dead, and dere she was,



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poor woman, with three children of his, at de head of a pork butchery bisness and no man to look after it. So she wrote me ter say that if I liked to come out and make matters up she was ready to receive me. She said I must come with faderly feelings for them three dear little children of hers. You bet I promised to come. Then she send the postal Anweisung, what do you call it? And I got new clothes, and now I'm off to meet her. It's a very fine bisness indeed she have got, and I daresay that when I gets ter de head of it I shall be able to deal with four pigs a week. At present she is only doing two. But it isn't dat so much what makes me so breezy and nice-feeling. Its them resolutions I have taken to lead a nice life there mit mine wife and the three dear little children what I shall be a fader to. All the follies of my past are well past. I have been punished enough for them. Now I hopes to make money and to become again a respectable tradesman. Is it not enough to make me snap mine fingers?"

"The prospect," I said, "is indeed an enchanting one. You say that you expect to deal with four pigs a week?"



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Elsewhere I came across an Italian peasant woman with seven children, who was going out to join her husband in Cleveland. He had preceded her to America five years previously, and had remitted money to her regularly every week. She had put it by, and now was able to join him with his children. She told me that she was thirty years old, but she looked fifty, and was much worried by the care of her large family. She complained of the steerage stewards, and said that she had been unable to get a drop of water. I made friends with the poor woman and helped her with the children, sometimes guarding them for a couple of hours whilst she snatched a little sleep. And though I could get them little water, which was most sparingly apportioned, I gave the attendant in her part of the hold a present of money so that he might be kind to her, and I was foolishly extravagant with my small means in buying oranges and sweets for her and her children at the canteen.

I passed the first night not too uncomfortably, for I was very tired. It was as well, for to a waking man the night in that hold with cases of nausea around him would have been horrible indeed.

passengers to them. I
watched the start with
perhaps with sadness in
that one of the birds
set out westwards, with
strong headwind blowing
the ship. It was blown
I could take it in my hand
or remonstrance, couple
me from the upper deck
had had no intention to
But as I knew that it was
bearer of messages I put
head and whispered: 'Go
go. I watched its skin
lost in mist.

In spite of the entire
spent, when not asleep
bucket in the

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heart of courage than ever since the day when it seemed to me that all happiness in life was over for me. Was it because of the example of the people amongst whom I lived who considered as the merest bagatelle the catastrophe I had invested with such tragic horror? Did it occur to me that I had fancied myself the exception, when, according to the experiences of my travelling companions, I had but come under the incidence of a general rule? I do not know, but doubtless the large spirit of tolerance which, garlic-scented, was wafted towards me from so many mouths, helped to soothe the angry gusts of resentment which, time and again, shook my frame.

The rude unkindness of my messmates depressed me, not because of its effect on me either materially or morally, but because it seemed to me such a pity that these people, Ishmaels of Society, should foster division amongst themselves. They are deaf to the Divine lesson, which is of such tremendous social significance, "Love one another." It seemed to me that if the very poor, such as surrounded me, would follow that counsel, the misery of their condition would instantly disappear. Banded together, that large

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mass, the great majority of the public, the very poor would have irresistible force wherewith to demand justice and to obtain it. It is this cruelty towards his fellows, the outcome of a feeling of hatred and of egotism, which blackens the heart of the despairing pauper.

The other man's name was frequently mentioned. As one of the heroes of the war, he was singled out for special ridicule and abuse. It was supposed by my tormentors that references of an insulting kind to this man would vex me deeply, being an Englishman. They were right in their supposition. It did distress me, but not for the reason they imagined in their malice. Moving about a free man, contemplating the unspeakable beauties of sea and sky, the shifting hues of the waves, the glint of sunlight on some sea-bird's wing, a passing vessel under the moon, my heart bled when I thought of the black, black night that hemmed him in for ever. How these men would have laughed at me if I had told them that what they said about this man pained me because he had been my bitter enemy and was now in the worst distress which can befall a living man!



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We were eight days in crossing the Atlantic, and the morning of the second Sunday found us off Long Island. The excitement in the steerage was great, and each man made himself spruce for landing. But before that there were many formalities to be gone through. First, our tickets had to be examined again, and after that followed the medical inspection. It was a pure farce, and for us a tedious one. We were huddled together for hours on the deck, drenched with the spindrift, a swaying, jostling, blasphemous crowd. The firemen and stewards diverted themselves by clutching at the women in our midst; children were thrown down and trampled. I had appointed myself bodyguard to the Italian woman with the seven children, and I had to exert all my force to shield her and the little ones from the dangerous impact of the agitated crowd. I must have exerted myself more than my strength would admit of, for after I had passed the doctor I felt faint and sank down on a coil of rope, fearing to lose consciousness. This misaise persisted after I had managed to get to my feet, and I took little or no notice of the sights around me, which under other circumstances would have appealed to my



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curiosity—the shipping, the quays, the monstrous houses, the bustling animation of the scene.

It was past noon when we landed. The steerage passengers were detained in a large waiting-room, whilst their more fortunate ship-mates of the saloons departed inland. I sat down on my bag, too dizzy to take much notice of my surroundings; but I could not help observing with what brutality the Republican officials spoke to the emigrants. We were detained thus for over two hours, at the end of which time we were driven on board a barge and towed off to a place called the Barge Office for examination by the Commissioners of Immigration. Here those who appear undesirable as citizens of the great Republic are weeded out. Admission is refused to them. They are deported back to Europe. Had I the time before me, I would like to describe in full all the hardships to which I was made an unwilling witness in the sequence. But——

On landing at the Barge Office we were urged forward in various tongues by uniformed officials, who, where an additional stimulus to progression seemed necessary, did not hesitate to add violence of action to brutality of tongue. I saw women



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knocked down and men ill-treated. At another time I should have felt indignant. Then I felt that I needed rest badly. There was a flight of steps to be climbed in the midst of a jostling and elbowing crowd, and when, at last, the top landing was reached a struggle to be endured whilst the officials forced us into single line. In this order we passed one by one before a doctor in uniform. In most cases he let the travellers pass after a glance at their faces. Now and again, however, he felt a pulse or made a closer examination. Then a sign was given, and the man who appeared to him a physical "undesirable" was pushed into a kind of pen for further medical examination. It was no surprise to me that, as I passed in front of him, he should grip my wrist and peer into my face. I felt so ill from the extreme fatigue of that morning, the long waiting, and my nervous exhaustion that I knew my face must betray my condition. He gave a short sneering laugh after he had examined me, and gave the sign which relegated me into the pen of the physical suspects. Here we waited for a weary hour, when we were driven downstairs into a large room, where the staff of the sanitary service was at work. I presume that orders had



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been given recommending me to the special attention of the examining doctors, for I was at once summoned into a side room, where I was told in German to uncover my chest. I was thumped and prodded, and hairy ears were pressed against my skin.

The examination lasted several minutes. Then I was told to dress, and having done this was ordered to go into the adjoining waiting-room, and sit down. Whilst I was walking to my seat, I heard the doctor who had examined me, say—

“Say, Ferdie, that’s a very sick man. We’ve had some hearts in our time here, but I never saw a worse case.”

“Aye,” was the answer. “What surprises me is that he didn’t die on the passage out. I wouldn’t mind laying a hundred dollars to one that his heart is fifty per cent. above schedule. Guess I’ll be at his *post-mortem*.”

“No, sir,” said the other Sanitary Service man, “I am going to mark him down for early deportation. We don’t want him dying on Ellis Island. It means trouble and expense.”

“But do you think he can stand the return voyage, in the steerage, too?”



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"That's his look-out. What does he mean by coming over here in such a condition? Nuffsed. Come and look at this old scab with the cock-eyes. A beauty, ain't he?"

The minute after a man rushed up to me and thrust a paper into my hand. It was marked—"Heart-disease. Hold."

As a barrister practising at the Old Bailey, I had sometimes asked myself with pitying anguish what must be the feelings of the prisoner in the dock when the judge, putting on the black cap, passes upon him, in terms which leave no room for hope of reprieve, the sentence of death. I had come many thousand miles across the ocean to have that question answered.



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CHAPTER XVII.

SUCH gladness has come to me since that it appears almost unthankful to recall the cold horror that, after I had heard my sentence of death, possessed me. It was the instinctive revolt of Nature against imminent dissolution, the unreasoning fear of the Unknown. I sat for a long time, as though stricken in limb and in brain with numbing paralysis. My throat was parched, and before my eyes it was as though a mist enveloped all things.

I may have sat there a full hour, when one of the officials approached me and snatched the paper which I held in my hand out of my grasp. After glancing at it, he walked away, and presently returned with a card, which he thrust upon me. It was marked, "Detention Card," and under this printed text were written the words, "To be Deported." On another part of the card was written, "Serious Constitutional Disease," and next to this was a hieroglyphic, which, judging from



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the remarks which I had overheard, no doubt meant that if the Federal authorities wished to be spared the expense of burying a pauper immigrant, they had better see to my deportation without delay.

"Come along with me," said the official, touching my shoulder.

I obeyed passively, and followed him through various passages into a huge waiting-room full of noise and people. The warder gave me a push forward and slammed the door behind me. It was indeed a piteous sight that met my eyes, and the moisture dimmed them, after the significance of the scene had impressed itself upon me. This large room was crowded with men, women, and children of every nationality, of every age, of every kind of dress. Between them nothing seemed in common beyond a feeling, too clearly expressed on their unhappy faces, of utter despair. These were various immigrants, who for one reason or another had failed to satisfy the inspectors of the Immigration Board as to their suitability for admission to the United States. Many were without the six pounds sterling, which is the smallest sum that an immigrant must produce. Some were being



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“held” for deportation for reasons of insufficient strength. “We no strong enough, they say, for the United States,” said a poor little Roumanian Jew, whose detention card was marked with the fatal words: “Excluded with Family.” Some of the prisoners detained in this room, which was but the ante-chamber to the horrors of Ellis Island, had arrived that morning. There were the tipsy ones, who kept vociferating unceasingly in manifest excitement. Others sat in moody silence, some with tears trickling down their cheeks: these were people who, some for days, some for weeks, had been imprisoned on the island, and who had been brought to the office that morning, as was done every day, in case friends might claim them, or some employer present himself to take advantage of the misery of their position and secure their services at a fourth of the market-rate. Children were crying for the want of food, and such of the prisoners as had a little money were bargaining eagerly at a stall which stood at the far end of the ward, where the coarsest victuals were retailed at exorbitant prices.

“My little children,” said the Roumanian to me, “are dying of hunger. They is accustomed to a



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couple of pints of milk a day, and on the island they gets black bread and dried prunes and—footkicks.”

I pressed his hand and moved away, eager for more information on this horrible place. A great feeling of sympathy for these poor people now filled my heart. My own sufferings now troubled me less than ever. The prisoners were only too willing to tell me their wretched stories. An old Russian produced his detention card, and eagerly asked me to translate what was written upon it. I saw that it was marked, “Excluded—Senility,” but I could not find it in me to tell the poor old man that here was the one irrevocable warrant.

“If they send me back,” said the old man, “I shall land at Hamburg without a penny in my pocket, to find my way back to the South of Russia as best as I can. Friends tell me that I am too old for this country, and that that is the reason why they have locked me up. But, then, why did the agent in Odessa sell me my ticket out here? He knew the law, which I did not, and he took almost my last rouble from me. I have been detained on the island for twenty days.”

Elsewhere it was an old Italian woman, whose



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wailing cries rose above the clamour of a hundred tongues. She had been a prisoner for more than a month, and was marked down for deportation.

"I sold every stick of furniture that I possessed," she told me, "to get my ticket, and if they send me back to Naples, I shall die in the street. They had better keep me on their accursed island. They'll soon be rid of me then, for I have no teeth, and can't eat the bread they give me, and when soup is distributed, I am much too weak to fight for a share with the other women."

At this juncture an *intermezzo* in the proceedings was afforded in the form of a fight between one of the foul-mouthed warders and an Italian emigrant, whom the Bowery "tough" in office had assaulted. The emigrant, weak from long want of food, was soon knocked down, bleeding copiously, and—

"That's me!" said the Bowery tough.

Brutality seemed the order of the day, and many sights did I witness that made my poor heart beat. Women were pushed and hustled, blows were freely distributed, and even unhappy little children were not safe from violence.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, a door at



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the far end of the ward was flung open, and in rough terms of command we were ordered to pass through it. "Get on there!" "*Avanti!*" "*Vorwaerts!*" were the orders issued, and action often enforced command, when a prisoner failed to understand. In the scrimmage women were knocked down and trampled on. In passing out with the rest, I found myself hustled by the uniformed officials down a long flight of steps, along a passage, and out on to a landing-stage, alongside which a huge two-decked barge was moored. On to this barge we were driven by the warders like so many cattle. Sticks were freely used to hurry our progress. When all had been got on board, a small tug was tackled alongside the barge and began to hurry it off much like a small policeman conveying a big and disorderly labourer "by the arm." The way of the barge lay right across the river, in the direction of a small island which lay to the right of Bartholdi's magnificent statue of Liberty. This was Ellis Island, which was to be my home and perhaps my tomb. The barge was settled alongside what looked like an old excursion steamer. A plank was run across, and the brief order: "*Alles Frau!*" by which,



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presumably, "Women first" was meant, was issued. An old Russian who did not understand German and stepped forward was knocked down by the warder. "Women first, you swine!" were the words which accompanied this act of violence. Some pathetic scenes of leave-taking between husbands and wives and fathers and children now took place, for as my new Roumanian friend informed me, "the men sleep below, the women and children on the upper deck." But the warders in no wise approved of such sentimentalities, and with repeated cries of "Get on now!" "*Avanti!*" "*Avanti!*" "*Vorwaerts!*" accompanied by a free use of their fists and sticks, drove the weeping women and children ahead. We followed after them, stimulated to activity in the same way.

The detained emigrants were at that time "accommodated" on Ellis Island on board an old three-decked excursion steamer. The upper deck was reserved for the women and children; the men lay below on the two lower decks. There were provided about a hundred spring mattresses and as many pillows and rugs. After these had been disposed of, the three or four hundred late-comers had to find a sleeping-place on the dirty and

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verminous floor. There was no furniture of any kind, not a seat nor a table. The walls of the cabins were scrawled over with blasphemous and obscene inscriptions in every tongue. At six o'clock some lumps of badly-baked brown bread were distributed by an emigrant who was acting as orderly, a very dirty man. To each man who received a lump of bread, he gave also a handful of mouldy prunes.

"You had better take some," said the Roumanian to me, "for you will get nothing else to eat till to-morrow at noon, and that only if you are lucky."

The long evening dragged on. In various attitudes of misery and despair the prisoners lay about the crowded decks. From overhead the wailing of hungry little children could be heard, and men amongst us ground their teeth in impotent rage.

My Roumanian friend had managed to secure a berth for me next to his, and as soon as night had fallen I went with him down into the stinking hold where I was to pass the night. The place was brilliantly lighted with electric lamps. All the berths were occupied, and most of the poor wretches had found surcease of sorrow in uneasy sleep. I lay down on my couch, but not to sleep.



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It was the first moment of that dreadful day when I had time to gather my thoughts and to think of what I had heard. But already I had become familiar with the knowledge which had been imparted to me in so brutal a way. Indeed, amidst surroundings so dreadful, an unwilling witness of so much cruelty on the one hand, and of so much suffering on the other, imprisoned in a very Inferno of despair and misery, the thought of the release which death brings from the burthen of a cruel existence, was not one to appal. Rather, did I feel myself amongst all these unhappy people, as I listened to the crying of the little children overhead or saw on the upturned faces of the old men who lay to the right and to the left of me, the imprint which Hope leaves on our human clay when she takes flight for ever, the one man of all these men who had not the right to complain. My papers of enlargement had been made out, my passport was in my hand. For me a definite term had been set, not for my present sufferings alone but for all the renewing and recurrent ache of life. And as I pondered on, a thought came to me that filled my heart with such joy that I could have risen to my feet and cried aloud for gladness. It

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was that even as men allow to the criminal whom they have doomed to die indulgences during the brief period which their clemency has allotted him to live, I also might relax towards myself the cruel severity by which for months past I had lived a solitary life, separated from the one person that I loved. Why should I be harder on myself than is the prison-warder towards the man in the condemned cell? Why should I not for the few days or weeks which might remain to me allow myself the only happiness that life could afford me? Oh, how deeply then I prayed that my life might be spared a little longer, that freed from this prison and having crossed the ocean once more I might return home and be with my wife again, were it only for a month, a week, a day or two! To see her again, to kiss her, to tell her, as I could tell her now, that the Fault was not only forgiven but forgotten as though it had never been, to be happy again in one word. Each moment in her dear company would be enjoyed to the full. I should pass my time in spoiling her. I would never leave her all day, and when we separated at night, I would fold her in my arms to kiss her "good night." It was so necessary for her future



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happiness that she should be with me, when the end came. Before then, God being good, I should have had the time to prepare her gently, by slow degrees, for the separation. And there was more than this that I could do, that I would do. I could convey to her, in a subtle and delicate fashion, that in the improbable event of my death—I should put it in that way—there would be for her a means by which she could regain, as though she had never lost it, her self-esteem. I would designate to her as my successor the man whom she had once elected for a mate in preference to me. Indeed, if on my death-bed consciousness remained to me, I would beat about the bush no longer. I would say, "Marry him," and give that as my dying mandate, not to be disobeyed. My happiness in anticipation was so great that it overwhelmed the regret that I had not known of Nature's pronouncement against me before I left her. All those dreary months of solitude would have been spent with her. There would have been more time to prepare her for the change that was to come into her life. And I! What suffering would have been spared to me. But I did not care to dwell on the past, taken up as I was with

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the radiant future. I admired the wonderful logic of my destiny. I had come to the end of my possibility of happiness, and now I was to be no more. My existence was an obstacle to the reparation of a fault which tortured with remorse a woman admirable among women, and that obstacle was to be removed. She would live to be happy once more. How happy, knowing her, I could joyfully foresee. Children, perhaps, might come to her, and I could picture the glow in her dear eyes looking down on the baby at her breast. Yet, for human egotism always betrays itself, I longed for the days of grace before all things were to end for me.

It was praying that this might be allowed to me that I fell quietly asleep, more tranquil than I had been since I was a little child.

At five in the morning, I was wakened by a blow with a stick, and, starting up, saw that the warder in charge had aroused me after the manner of the place. The man was armed with a revolver and walked accompanied by two bloodhounds. At six o'clock the whole draggled, shivering, starving crew that we were, was driven on board the barge and once more towed back to Castle Gardens.

Of the brutalities that I again witnessed and



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on each succeeding day no record need be given. Amongst the revolting horrors of the place, I walked serene, different, apart. I felt that I had my pardon in my pocket, that it was only a question of a little time. Not that I remained indifferent to the sufferings of others. As far as I could I tried to alleviate them. I wrote letters for the unlettered. I comforted those who were not past listening to kindly words. I gave from my small means what helped a few poor mothers to feed their starving children. My composure, my serenity, aroused wonder amongst my unhappy fellow-prisoners. An Italian woman whom I used to meet in the ward at the Barge Office to which we were taken every morning from Ellis Island, once said to me—

“I cannot understand you at all, signor. We are all despairing here and you, who have been a prisoner longer than any one of us and who, they say, will never be allowed to enter the country, seem quite resigned and even happy. I wish you would tell me your secret for happiness. I need it badly.”

Whether I was forgotten by the officials, or whether there was no room on the first steamers of the Transatlantique Company which returned to



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Europe, I do not know. The fact remains that I was kept a prisoner for close upon three weeks, spending my days in the ward at the Barge Office and my nights on the steamer at Ellis Island. My weakness increased, for I was without other food during the whole of that time, except the bad bread and an occasional plate of nameless soup, but hope kept the spirit alive in me. For the rest, to divert my thoughts and find an occupation for the long hours, I set to work to write these pages. I thought that if I died suddenly, they might come into my wife's hands, and that reading my story she might be comforted to know that I never had bitterness against her; that to the end I loved her.

It was a difficult task to write when I was not one minute alone and when at all times, day and night, the sound of weeping was ringing in my ears, no unfit accompaniment, by-the-way, to the words that my pen was tracing.

I devoted nearly the whole of my time to this work, and progressed rapidly. By the time my confinement ceased my record had been brought up to date.

On a Saturday morning on arriving at the Barge Office I was put in charge of two warders and



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marched between them to the dock of the French Company. Here I was taken on board the steamer *Aquitaine*, and handed over to the quartermaster, by whom I was conducted to the "brig" or ship's lock-up, where I was incarcerated. Three or four hours after the ship had left New York I was released.

"As you are travelling back to France at the Company's expense," said the quartermaster, "you will be expected to make yourself useful. Take this scrubbing-brush and start scouring the decks. If you don't do your work properly, your victuals are likely to run short. Get on with you!"

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE voyage, begun under auspices so unfavourable, was to be indeed a pleasant one. I shall remember it with thankfulness all my life. That term has in my case little importance, you may say. I am not sure of that. Why may not the doctors in New York have been mistaken? They were prejudiced against the pauper immigrant in the first place, and then their examination of me was hasty. I have always heard it said that people with heart diseases live longer than others. However that may be, I know that during that pleasant voyage I seemed to regain my strength wonderfully; my spirits improved and the symptoms which had troubled me disappeared.

How could I be other than very happy, when each beat of the screw bringing me nearer home awoke in my breast an echoing beat of gladness? The weather was splendid; we had the sun by day and the moon by night. My fellow-passengers in the steerage were very different people from the



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poor wretches with whom I had travelled out. Apart from one or two other people, deported like myself, there was not a shabbily-dressed man or woman amongst them. For the most part they were people who having prospered in the States were paying a visit to the old country to see friends and relatives; many were going merely on a pleasure-trip. Also the treatment of the third-class passengers on the return voyage was the reverse of that accorded to the emigrants. The stewards were civil and obliging. It is true that towards me, at first, they acted with great rudeness. I seemed to be the ship's drudge, and even the cabin-boys seemed to think that they had a right to order me about. But leaving myself out of consideration, I may say that the whole moral atmosphere of the steerage on the *Aquitaine* was a pleasant one, reeking of health, prosperity and hope. No limits seemed to be set to the third-class passengers. They invaded every part of the ship. I saw one or two of my messmates one afternoon on the promenade deck talking with the saloon passengers. We were American citizens and brooked no restraint.

I have said that amongst these happy people

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were one or two passengers who, like myself, had been refused admission to the States and were being deported back to Europe. One of these undesirables was a poor German girl, whose case was at first a cause of great distress to me, unable as I was to assist her. She had been deserted some months previously in Germany by the man with whom she had been living. He had gone to New York and was in good employment there. At first she had resigned herself to his treachery, but finding that she was about to become a mother, she had determined to follow him and to force him to legitimize his child by marrying her. "If I could have got to see him," she told me tearfully, "I could have made him do what I wished. But those people would not let me land. No unmarried woman in my condition is allowed to enter the States. I wrote letter after letter to the man, but it was easy for him to ignore my letters, and he gave no sign of life. I was detained two weeks in Ellis Island, and am now being sent back with my shame upon me to Germany. My people will have nothing to do with me. I shall not be able to find work in this condition. I spent my last savings to pay my passage out. I do not know what will



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become of me, or of my child if God brings it into the world." It was a very hard case, and what could I say to comfort the poor girl? During the first day or two I used to see her sitting moodily on a coil of rope with her head in her hands. Then I heard that she tried to throw herself overboard, but had been prevented in time, and was now a prisoner in the brig, where she would be confined till Havre was reached.

There was amongst my fellow-passengers another whose case did not make for my gladness. This was a poor Italian who was going home on an errand similar to mine—to die. He was in an advanced stage of consumption, and the only hope that remained to him in life was to keep well enough to be able to reach his native village in Piedmont to die, with his old mother to close his eyes and to be buried in the churchyard where his forefathers lay. Would it have comforted him—human nature being what it is—to hear that I was in the same position as he was, although my malady was not so apparent, that my hopes in this world were not a whit more ambitious than his? I had the thought of trying to comfort him by telling him these things, but a superstitious fear

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checked me. I dreaded to remind Death of my existence, for I badly wished to live a little while longer. But I did what I could for the poor man. I fetched and carried for him, and it was I who used to carry him from his berth on to the deck and back again. Unfortunately, I was too poor to do more, and it was very necessary that he should have had better food, some stimulants and comforts if his heart's desire was to be realised.

These two centres of sorrow—the weeping girl in the brig, and the dying man, so wasted and yellow, coughing in his chair on the deck—did at first affect me so that I did not anticipate much pleasure from my voyage. As it turned out they were to be a source of additional satisfaction to me.

It came about in this way. On the third morning after our departure from New York, I was rubbing some brasswork on deck. It was just after luncheon, and the promenade-deck was crowded with first-class passengers who, as usual, were staring at us of the steerage as if we were curious zoological specimens. I could feel myself the object of much languid scrutiny from these fashionable heights, and this did not surprise me,



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for it must have been strange to see a man of my age, attire, and appearance, working as I was, as a common drudge. No doubt that the fact was known that I was a deported emigrant, and no doubt every reason except the right one why I had been deported had suggested itself to their idle speculations. They were all rich people hastening to Europe to spend their superfluity in unctuous enjoyment. I used to smile as I thought what their expressions would be if I could tell them that to me the outcast and the drudge alone a certainty of happiness was assured, whilst for them the future which appeared bright and festive might hide in its lap disappointments which could not possibly attain me.

Whilst I was pursuing my work, I felt myself touched on the shoulder, and, looking round, saw an old gentleman, whom I had frequently noticed on the saloon deck as one who seemed to take great interest in the third-class passengers. I admit I had attributed it to impertinent curiosity.

"*Sollen wir so eins nehmen?*" he said, pointing to the hatchway which led to the second-class refreshment bar, which was used by the free and independent steerage passengers of the *Aquitaine*.



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"You must be thirsty with all that polishing, and a bottle of beer will do you good."

I did not feel the want of beer, but I did not refuse the old gentleman's invitation. It requires sometimes as much charity to accept an offer which is made from motives of kindness, albeit mistaken, as prompts that kindness, and he looked such a good, simple, fatherly old man that I felt sure a refusal would hurt his feelings. So I did what I have seen workmen do under similar circumstances—I passed the back of my hand over my lips, and I said: "That suits me."

After we had seated ourselves at a table in the refreshment bar, with a bottle of beer between us, my host commenced the conversation by introducing himself. He was, he told me, President and Treasurer of a big brewing and malting company in a town in Illinois, and as he said, "absurdly rich." He had a suite of state rooms on the steamer, and was terribly bored with all the fuss that was made about him by the attendants. Also he never could accustom himself to the "cofossal meals" which were served to him. Twelve courses! Was it not absurd for a single man? The conversation of the people in the saloons tired him. It



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was all about dollars; there was nothing idealistic in it. For the rest his sympathies and interests always had been with the working-classes, for he was by origin a workman himself. He had emigrated to the States forty years previously as a steerage passenger on a sailing vessel from Bremen, which had taken thirty-nine days to cross the ocean.

"There were no twelve courses on that vessel," he said laughing.

He was going to Europe on some very important business, but hoped to combine pleasure with it, and was looking forward to paying a visit to the little village where he had been born. He then added that he had heard that I had been deported by the Emigrant Commissioners, and that it had surprised him very much to see a man like me, who looked intelligent, in such a position, scrubbing decks and rubbing metal-work. Would I gratify his curiosity, which was not at all prompted by indiscreet motives, and tell him something about myself? I satisfied him at once, and told him that I had been refused admission on medical grounds, but that I was very glad to return to Europe, and that as to the menial labour imposed



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upon me, it seemed to me only fair that I should do some work in return for my passage and board. He was evidently very pleased that I should confide in him, and insisted on ordering "*noch eins*"—another bottle of beer. Whilst we were discussing this he began to tell me about the business which was taking him to Europe. The malting company of which he was president had commenced legal proceedings in connection with the infringement of some patent of theirs, a process connected with their industry. The interests involved were enormous. "It means hundreds of thousands of dollars," he said. He added that he personally had no need of additional wealth, but that he had sons and daughters, and besides that it was a man's duty to fight for his rights. He said that his side had a very good case, but he seemed anxious too about certain points of law. Now, if ever I had had any distinction as a barrister it was by my really great competence in the Patent Laws. This branch had been my speciality, and with better fortune I might have gained at the Bar a most remunerative reputation. So I said to the old gentleman—

"If you will tell me all the particulars of the case,



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I may be able to satisfy your doubts as to the validity of your claim. I have studied the English law."

The old gentleman was delighted. It was evident that the subject interested him deeply, and that his anxiety as to the issues of the lawsuit was much keener than he had cared to confess.

"Come along with me," he cried, springing up and gripping me by the arm. "We will go to my state-room, and I will show you the papers. Ah, I thought you were not what you looked! If you can put my mind at ease about this troublesome business so that I can get some sleep at nights, you will have obliged a man who won't be ungrateful."

The first-class passengers stared to see the steerage-drudge walking arm-in-arm with the richest man on board, and I heard not a few exclamations of surprise as we entered his cabin together. Here, in spite of my protestations, he rang for champagne and cigars, and when these had been served he placed the papers before me. Amongst these was a careful *résumé* which had been submitted for opinion to an eminent London barrister, whose written pronouncement, to which I turned first, was decidedly unfavourable to the

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claims of the American Company. I knew this counsel well and never had had a high opinion of his capacity. His reputation had been gained, as most professional reputations are, by a series of lucky flukes, and I felt certain that his opinion was one which it would not be difficult to refute. I read the *résumé* with the greatest attention, referring now and again to the various other papers, specifications, affidavits, and so on which had been placed before me and taking notes. I was delighted to find that although I had practically abandoned my legal studies for more than two years, my memory was as good as ever, and I was able to jot down in connection with the points which I proposed to explain the names of various precedents of great importance. I worked on in silence for over two hours, so absorbed in my task that I was quite surprised, when I had finished, to find myself, not in my old chambers in the Temple, but in a state-room of a steamer in mid-Atlantic. During the whole of this time the old millionaire had not spoken a word, but had remained sitting in his armchair smoking cigar after cigar.

"Well," he said, when, heaping the papers together, I looked up at last.



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"Well," I said, "I don't think you have any cause at all for anxiety. I should say that you are certain to win your case."

"You don't say?" he cried, beaming all over. "Tell me why?"

I then began to read to him the opinion I had written down, quoting the various cases which bore on the question, and which had all been decided in favour of contentions similar to those raised by the side which he represented. It took me more than an hour to give him my detailed opinion, for he cross-examined me with a shrewdness I had not expected to find.

When I had finished he crossed over to me and put out his hand and said—

"You can't think what a relief you have brought me. You are the first man who has seen the true aspect of this case, and you are the man who is going to fight this case for the Illinois Brewing and Malting. I, Van Behrens, president and treasurer, tell you so. And now say," he added, pulling open a drawer in the table and producing a fat wallet, "what do we owe you for this lengthy consultation?"

"Nothing," I said, shaking my head with a

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smile. "At the English Bar we have certain rules of etiquette, and one of them is that we never take fees from clients direct. For the rest I am very pleased if what I have been able to tell you will relieve your anxiety. It is my sincere opinion that you have a winning case."

He had produced a handful of American notes.

"I have paid away thousands of dollars over this business," he cried, "and got nothing but poppy-cock in return. You are the first man I have heard who seems to know anything about the law, and, see here, your opinion is worth money to me. I am not going to——"

I shook my head.

"No, sir," I said. "Put away that money. Even if I could take it, which I can't, I have no use for it."

He stared at me in surprise.

"Well, this beats me," he cried. "*Primo*, I find a first-class lawyer polishing brass-work on the intermediate deck. *Secundo*, he gives me a consultation of the very finest order, quotes Dadelzen versus What's-his-Name, and the rest of it to show me that I'm an old chump to worry about this



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case, and proves it too. *Tertio*, he refuses a fee. Say, if Barnum was on board, I guess he'd want you to tour with him as a phenomenon. Don't be vexed at my joking," he added. (I suppose my expression betokened that my professional dignity was somewhat ruffled by his way of speaking). "I have told you what I am and what I come from. But sincerely I am deeply obliged to you for what you have done, and I do not like to take such valuable professional services for nothing. I shall certainly insist that you act for me in this case, and you must give me your London address right now."

"I can do that," I said, "without any breach of professional etiquette. But any brief must come to me through a firm of solicitors. I need say nothing more on that head. As to any recognition of this afternoon's work, I repeat it has been a real pleasure to me to advise you, if only because I find that my memory hasn't failed me. It happens that I have always made a special study of international and patent law. I cannot accept any money from you. That would be entirely against our rules. But if I have really obliged you as much as you are good enough to say, might I interest you in two poor people who are fellow-passengers of mine.

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One of them is a countrywoman of yours, and her case is a particularly hard one."

I then spoke to him about the poor girl in the brig. He was to his feet in a moment.

"You wait for me here," he cried. "I'll fix that up in a couple of shakes. That poor girl!"

With these words he darted out of the cabin, and the minute after I heard him demanding an interview with the captain. When he came back about half-an-hour later, I noticed that his eyes were red. He had seen the prisoner, and had listened to her story. It had affected him—how could it be otherwise?—and it had been an easy matter for him to comfort the wretched woman. He had given her a small sum of money; he didn't tell me how much, but I fancy it was more than the "trifle" of which he spoke so contemptuously, and having exacted a promise from her that she would "behave like a good girl," had induced the captain to release her.

"We have a business correspondent in Bremen," he added, "and I am giving this girl a letter for him. She will find employment in his factory at once, and she will be kindly treated when her time comes. So she will be all right. I left her trying to dance with joy. But," he added, "that has been



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a pleasure for me to help this poor countrywoman of mine. It don't pay you my debt."

"Ah, well!" I said, laughing with contentment, "then there's something else you can do for me."

I then told him of the consumptive patient, and pointed out at how little expense the poor fellow could be helped to realise his last and only hopes. The head steward was summoned at once, and appeared bowing and scraping. Mr. Van Behrens told him to arrange with the steerage officials that my *protégé* was to be served every day from his own table, and that champagne, fruit, and every other delicacy were not to be lacking to him.

I thanked the old gentleman effusively. He had removed the only causes of unhappiness that troubled my happy voyage. Now, indeed, I should be able to give myself up to the pleasures of joyful anticipation. I had never pocketed a professional fee with greater pleasure. But he was far from satisfied, and again pressed money on me. I refused with some asperity of tone. Whereupon he apologised.

"But," he said, "you are not going to return to that pig-life. And to begin with you will dine with me here to-night. I'll see afterwards about fixing

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you up in one of my state-rooms. I am not going to lose sight of you. The interests of my company are at stake."

I accepted his invitation to dinner, and spent a very pleasant evening with the kindly, simple-spoken old man. But I refused his offers of further hospitality, and insisted upon returning to my quarters when the time for retiring came. He tried all his powers of persuasion to make me change my mind, and I had to explain to him once more the rules and principles by which English barristers conduct themselves. He accompanied me as far as the steerage hatchway, and as I bade him "good night," before descending into the noisome pit where I was to sleep, he cried out—

"To think that a man like you should sleep there!"

On the following morning, I had the delight of conversing with the poor woman whose release I had been able to obtain, and I should have been callous indeed if her great joy at the wonderful change in her prospects had not filled me with sincere pleasure. At noon a further delight awaited me, when passing the not uncomfortable cabin reserved for sick steerage-passengers, I saw my



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poor Italian seated before a *pranzo*, of which, he said, "It arouses my desire to go on living." I pledged him in a glass of champagne, which he was so good as to offer to me, and I could see that the good fare had already put some strength into him.

Van Behrens, contrary to my request, must have occupied himself on my behalf also, for that morning the steerage lieutenant told me, speaking to me in a very different manner from the one to which he had accustomed me, that I need do no further work on the ship.

"You have paid for your passage," he said. "We only wanted you to show *de la bonne volonté*, and you have shown it."

He then told me that I should find my cover laid at his private table. I hesitated at first, but in the end decided that it would be more gracious on my part not to raise objections, and I must say that the good food and wine which I now enjoyed benefited my general health considerably.

Thus it was that this voyage begun under circumstances so gloomy proved to me a very pleasant one. I watched the happiness of the poor woman, I saw the Italian gaining strength and colour. The

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weather was glorious; the whole ship throbbed with contentment. Without attaching too much importance to the promises of my new friend it pleased me at times to think that if by chance the doctors had been mistaken, and that I was to be spared for longer than I had thought, it would be indeed a great satisfaction to me to re-enter the arena triumphantly, briefed in a case which I could see would be one of the greatest interest to the profession. Everybody had thought, many had hoped, that I had gone down under the waters for ever. I knew, I felt that I could carry this case to victory. A certain triumph lay before me. But on such remote contingencies I did not care to dwell. I let them tinge my horizon with hues of promise, but gave myself up for the present to the actual delight of my surroundings and immediate prospects. How thankless I had been ever to despair of the great happiness of life. Yet all the same the thought of death had now no terrors for me.



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CHAPTER XIX.

WE reached Havre early one Sunday morning. Mr. Van Behrens came into the steerage to say "Good-bye." He was most cordial, and expressed the hope of meeting me in London. "I could rely," he said, "that all his legal business in England should benefit me." I made no comment on these offers, but I thanked him very heartily for his kindness to my poor friends. By his orders both of them had been supplied by the steward with a hamper of excellent provisions to take with them on their journeys. The German girl was radiant. "I wouldn't marry that fellow now, if he asked me to," she said, referring to her betrayer in New York. As for the Italian, he looked quite a different man, and told me that his plans for the future were much more ambitious now than when he had come on board the ship.

It had been my intention to proceed from Havre to London by the boat to Southampton. On

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inquiry, however, I learned that the boat did not run on Sundays. I accordingly decided to travel via Dieppe and Newhaven. The easiest way seemed to go round by Paris, communications between Havre and Dieppe being slow and troublesome. Accordingly, as soon as I had got away from the ship, I hurried to the telegraph office and dispatched a message to my wife. "Am, coming back home, darling," I wrote. I felt exuberantly happy. By that time on the morrow I should be back in the company of her for whom my heart had ached so long.

I reached Paris at noon, and leaving my bag in the cloak-room at the Gare St. Lazare, went out into the town. There would, I knew, be letters for me from my wife at the post-office, and my eagerness was great to read her dear words. I took a cab and bade the coachman drive fast.

There was only one letter for me, but it was from her. I crossed over to a café opposite the post-office to read it. Alas! the first words that caught my eye brought bitter disappointment to me. Across the top of the first page she had written, "Address to the post-office at Rome." And I had hoped to fold her in my arms on the morrow.



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The letter was from St. Malo, and had been written in the room above the grocery. It was dated about five weeks back.

"Dearest," she wrote, "is my punishment never to cease? What could have made me suffer more than on arriving here, full of hope and expectation, to find that you had fled at the news of my approach? Have you lost all love for me? Do I seem to you an unclean thing? But, there, I will not scold you. Only I am very unhappy, and should have been so happy if you had liked. No doubt you have a good motive in acting as you have done, but the "right" is often terribly hard to bear, and I am sure you are suffering fully as much as I am. I came to tell you that there is a reason why I cannot remain alone at home any longer. I had closed up my house, and I came to you a homeless wanderer to ask you to guide my future steps. I will not tell you what the reason is, in writing. I could have made you understand in words which would not have aroused your anger, in writing I cannot. But it is impossible for me to stay on living in Norwood.

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"I arrived here this morning by the boat, and came straight to this house. Poor darling, to think that you have lived so long amongst such surroundings. I am writing, by-the-way, in the gloomy room in which you slept. You must have tired your eyes dreadfully working at those dreadful books in this bad light! And they tell me you worked so hard. Is it true, dear, that you used to grind the coffee and serve the little boys with sweets?

"There was nobody in the shop when I entered, and as I was very tired I sat down on a chair and waited. Then I heard people talking in a place at the back. I did not want to listen, but I could not help hearing. They were talking about you and your disappearance. When I had gathered that you had gone, I felt so faint that I could not speak or move. And this is what I heard—

"‘I expect him back at any minute,’ said a young voice.

"‘Oh! You expect him back?’ cried a voice which was thickened as though the person speaking had something in her mouth. ‘My poor girl, when will you learn to know the world? Your precious Englishman was seen going on board



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the boat for Havre at midnight, last night. It was a custom-house officer who saw him, and who has just told me so at the corner of the street.'

"'Gone!' cried the other. 'By the boat! He has left me alone in my trouble, without a word of farewell. Oh, no, mother-in-law, it can't be.' The speaker was evidently in great distress.

"'What else could you expect?' answered the munching voice. 'He owes you a pretty penny, I can see. Well, let this be a lesson to you. You know about the rats and the sinking ships. As long as the sweetbreads and the soles and the shilling-claret were going, so long he stuck to you. But when the larder was empty and the bailiff was poking his ugly nose in at the door, your Englishman left you, à l'Anglaise!'

"'The poor fellow could not face the worry, no doubt. And to tell you the truth, there's nothing very agreeable in the situation.'

"'Poor fellow, indeed! To leave you without a word of thanks after all your kindness to him. Poor, dear man. But that is not what I came to speak to you about. You will have the bailiffs in to-day at noon, and I think you might let me have a few groceries to carry home before then—a

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pound or two of coffee, some packets of chocolate, and an assortment of potted-meat.'

" 'No, mother-in-law! I have told you so before. Besides, in this note which he has left for me, he says that he may be able to stave off this disaster for me.'

" 'Yes, believe that and drink water!' cried an old lady coming out of the back into the shop. She was peeling a mandarine. When she saw me, she turned back and cried out: 'Julie, there's a customer for you.'


"Then your poor friend came out of the dark. I could see she had been crying. Her pretty blue eyes were reddened. Darling, I do not believe a word of the stories that the old woman told me afterwards. Do you know that at first, I almost hoped that it was true, because that would in some measure have made us equal. It was a very mean thought, and I am ashamed of it.

"I told her who I was, and then she told me what I knew already, alas, that you had gone! Then she gave me the letter you had left for me. I could see that my appearance astonished both the women very much, for now I am nicely dressed again, and I did you honour. When I had read



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your letter I burst out crying, and the poor woman joined in. The old woman seemed quite indifferent to her grief, and I noticed, in spite of my distress, that she was filling her pockets from the various drawers. She was humming, '*Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre*,' etc., no doubt in ironical allusion to you. After a while Julie Bron made me come upstairs, and gave me some herb-tea to drink, which was very nasty, I thought; and whilst I was drinking it she told me all she knew of your sudden flight. When I had recovered myself a little, and had re-read your message, I took my purse out of my pocket, and laying a fifty-pound note on the table, I said: 'My husband has ordered me to give you this.' She asked me what it was, and I told her the value of the note in French money. At first she refused to touch it, and seemed hurt and angry, and when I remembered this afterwards, when the old woman had told me those calumnies about you, I thought it was a proof that she was telling the truth, for, of course, under such circumstances, a woman would not accept money from the man's wife, her rival. I pressed it on her, saying that it was your request that I should lend her this



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money, and that I should get into trouble with you if I did not execute your orders, you tyrant ! Just then that horrid old woman came smirking into the room and said : 'Julie, those gentlemen are there, the bailiffs.' Julie turned pale and ran downstairs. Then the old lady began to talk to me. She said that she had always liked you, but that people had made her life a burthen to her about your intimacy with her son's widow. She pointed to your bed, and then to the place at the back, and asked me if it was not enough to make people talk, two young people sleeping in such proximity. I did not say much for I was too overcome. Presently Julie returned quite scarlet and pounced on the note which was lying on the table and darted out of the room without a word. I heard loud voices below. Then she came back, radiant and actually embraced me. She told me I had saved her life, for she could not have survived the disgrace of being sold up. The mother-in-law seemed rather disappointed at the turn matters had taken, but she pretended to be very pleased, and added her thanks to her daughter's. She said that no one would ever have thought that so poor a man could have so elegant and moneyed a wife. Then



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Julie insisted on giving me different promises to pay for the re-imbursement of the sum. I think that if I had not felt so very tired, I should have taken the train to Havre in the hope of catching you up. But on reflection I decided that this would only grieve you, and you know that that is the last thing I wish to do. So I asked Julie to let me lie down with my head on your pillow once more, and cried myself to sleep. It was late in the afternoon when I awoke. I found Julie sitting by my bedside with a cup of her nasty herb-tea in her hand. I told her that I needed more substantial fare than that, that I was very hungry. At which her face beamed. "I have just made some excellent broth," she said, "and you shall have some directly, with a couple of fresh-laid eggs." I have just finished lunching, and I am writing to you. I shall send this letter as you directed me to do, to Paris, and I beg and implore you if you have any love left for me to write to me as soon as it reaches you. I cannot live as I am living now. I need companionship. I need affection. I thirst for love. I want you to protect me against the weakness of my nature. Oh, if I could tell you all. I cannot return to Norwood, at least for a long time, and



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until you let me be with you again—as you will, dear, won't you?—I shall wander about Europe trying to drown my sorrow in the excitement of seeing new places and fresh faces. I shall go straight to Italy from here, and travel to all those places that we used to talk about, the places we were to have visited when we became rich. Now that we are rich, you won't come with me. Is it not dreadful? It is so dark in this room that I can hardly see what I am writing, and so I will bring this long letter to a close. When I began writing it, I felt inclined to quarrel with you. I forgot that I have no right to raise my voice. Now I feel nothing but the deepest love for you and a great longing to be with you, and I forgive you even the great grief you have made me suffer to-day because I know that you think you are doing what is right and honourable. I shall sleep here to-night, with my head on your pillow, once more, and to-morrow I shall start on my lonely wanderings. Good-night, dear, and God bless you."

I pressed the letter to my lips and then without a moment's hesitation dashed off a telegram to Rome—



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"I have come back to you and await you in Paris at the Hotel O'Connell, Rue Caumartin. Come quick."

For it was necessary that I should remain in Paris till my wife rejoined me. The hotel which I had given was kept by an Irishwoman, whom I had known in Paris for more than twenty years, and here I was assured of a kindly welcome. I could go nowhere else, for my money had almost all run out; indeed, had I proceeded to London, I should have arrived there without the price of a night's lodgings in my pocket. But for this circumstance, I should, I think, have started off for Rome at once, so great was my impatience to meet her again. I had so little time before me for happiness, I did not want to lose a single hour.

I was received by the good Irishwoman with great kindness, and soon found myself installed comfortably in a bright room which looked out on the boulevards. Here I at once set to work on my translation, for it was necessary for me to get in some money. I had no intention of being a source of expense to my wife. Whilst I was toiling over the adventures of a gentleman, whose morality seemed to have been even lower than that of the

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pork-butcher I had met on my journey out to New York, I kept thinking with pleasurable anticipation that if Mr. Van Behrens kept his promises I might step at once into a better position than I had ever held before. In the meanwhile I continued writing prose at a halfpenny the line. My wife's photograph was on the table before me to stimulate my energy when it flagged. From time to time, I pressed it to my lips. Mentally I was in good form for my work, but had a curious difficulty in the manual labour of writing. My hand felt strangely numbed, almost lifeless; otherwise I felt well and dined that night with remarkable appetite. After dinner I went out on to the boulevards, whose exhilarating joyousness invaded me. I passed many spots which I associated in my mind with the past, but at not one place did a comparison between those days and the present incline me to melancholy. On the contrary, so full was I of the joy of life that I felt how much happier I was now than then, when my future was uncertain and full of the menace of unawaited evils. Now, I had before me a straight, beflowered path, along which I had but to pass to the eternal rest where nothing could ever trouble me again.



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I had hoped that in the morning I might receive a telegram from Italy, but none came. No doubt my wife was travelling outside of Rome, and possibly had not arranged that her letters should be forwarded. I might have to wait several days before my message reached her. Well, I had plenty of occupation, and for material comfort I could not desire better quarters. So I resigned myself to patience, and spent my days laboriously. As a relaxation from my drudgery, I finished these pages as far as my story has gone. I am writing these lines on the fifth day after my arrival in Paris. No news from my wife. This shows that it is rash and presumptuous to count on absolute happiness even where one's ambition is so small as was mine. Five days lost of the days that remained to me! Well, when the meeting does come, it will be all the sweeter for this delay. But may it come soon!

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CONCLUSION.

(COMPILED FROM VARIOUS SOURCES.)

ON the afternoon of the sixth day after his arrival in Paris, the writer of the story which has been read, left his hotel, saying to his good Irish landlady that he felt little disposed for work, and thought that a walk in the town might do him good. "The poor man had been very anxious," she afterwards related, "because no message came for him. All that morning he kept running downstairs to ask if there was not a telegram for him. He seemed to have something on his mind. If it was money that was worrying him, he should have told me. I have known him for over twenty years as the most honourable man that walks the face of the earth, and he could have had anything that he required from me."

As a matter of fact it was not the want of money that was troubling him, but, as he marked in his



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note-book, a terrible and apprehensive feeling of loneliness. "I feel," he wrote, "as though I were altogether outside the world already!"

To combat this feeling he betook himself to the busiest streets of Paris, mingled with the throng, and took advantage of every pretext for getting into conversation with people. At one time in the course of this boulevard walk he entered a *café* and made the following entries in his pocket-book—

"I am feeling very bad, and I begin to realise that it may have been presumptuous on my part to map out for myself a future of happiness, brief as I had expected it to be, resigned as I was to enjoy it only for the shortest time. I have been imprudent, I have taxed my strength too much, and I forgot that the adversary against whom I have been playing gives not a tittle of grace. I cannot bear to think that what I so desire is to be refused me, but as it is wise to prepare for any emergency, I append here the names and addresses of my wife and a friend of mine, an English writer, who lives in Paris, and who used to be attached to me. Under other circumstances, I would have gone to him, but he might turn from me in my present position, and as I like him very well, it would pain

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me; for I could not explain how it is that I have come to be what I am."

He then wrote a letter to his wife. This is a copy of it—

"Dearest—It is possible that this will be the last time that I shall write to you. I cannot write much, for I feel very ill, and my right hand is almost dead. A saraband of black spots is dancing before my eyes. If you have been to the post-office at Rome you will have found my letters and my telegram, and so you will know that I had repented of my hardness towards you, and that I was hastening back to be with you, never to leave you again. I did so look forward to our meeting. But I fear that the doctors were right, and that the inevitable is close upon me. If this be so; if I am fated never to see your dear face again, if this is to be the last time that I can speak to you, let me say once more that I have always loved you, that for the Fault I had no anger, only great pity, and that what comforts me now in the cold despair of an eternal parting from you is that it is now in your power to make all things right. Return to Norwood, and after the time of decent mourning



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is past, accept advances no longer dishonourable. It is my earnest wish, my dying request. It will efface whatever remains of defilement; it will give you back your self-respect; it will make it possible for you to be happy again. And had I ever any other wish in this life than that my darling should be happy? I feel very, very lonely, and it is that that alarms me. It is as if the silence and the night had already closed around me. From where I sit I can see towering above the city, high up in the pellucid air of Paris, a mighty, golden cross. It is the cross of the Church of the Sacred Heart on the hill of Montmartre. It seems to draw me towards it. You know that I often told you that I wished to see this church, but its attraction for me to-day seems to be prompted by another feeling than that of curiosity. To be out of the town, with all its sufferings; to be above the world, close to the cross. It seems to me that my loneliness would trouble me no more up there in those serene heights. I shall try to reach the church, walking slowly, and resting on the way, and if I do reach it, dear, I will pray fervently for your happiness."

His pilgrimage up the Mountain of the Martyrs

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was a long one. Different people saw him on his way, and remarked on the ghastly pallor of his face. But they all noticed the beauty of his expression, as, with his eyes fixed on the towering Cross, he climbed step after step.

"A bigot, if I ever saw one," said a tradesman who had seen him pass. "His eyes were like those of an *illuminé*."

The sun was setting when he reached the open space before the church, and he was seen resting against the balustrade, looking down on Paris. Under the red sky the gold and glory of the imperial city lay like a lake of fire. A low continuous hum, like the lapping of distant waves, rose from the shimmering gulf. He gave a great sigh at so much beauty, and turned towards the portal of the church. It was almost dark within. Here and there were flecks of light where votive candles burned before the storied saints. In a remote loft, the choirboys were practising a chant, familiar to the ears of Protestants as the Noel where herald angels sing welcome to the new-born king. The music was very distant, very low, but drew away the ear from the persistent rattle of the beggars' money-boxes.



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He sat down on a chair in the deep shadow of a pillar, and bent his head forward. A woman, who was kneeling behind him, heard him repeat several times a woman's name.

* * * * *

An hour later, the vergers making their rounds to clear the church of any homeless vagabonds who might be hiding in the hope of shelter for the night, came upon an ill-dressed man who seemed to be asleep.

"This is no hotel for sleepers," cried the man, shaking the stranger by the arm.

When he released his grip upon the shabby sleeve the body rolled off the chair and fell to the ground. A look of great contentment was on the face of the dead man.

FINIS.



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